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OLD MOTLEY

AUDREY LUCAS



COLLINS
48 PALL MALL LONDON
1938

THIS BOOK IS SET IN FONTANA, A NEW TYPE
FACE DESIGNED FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF THE
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For
DOUGLAS

*The following characters in this story
are not fictitious*

MADAME VESTRIS

CHARLES J. MATHEWS

WILLIAM VINING

J. R. PLANCHÉ

WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY

COUNT ALFRED D'ORSAY

Although hardly ranking as characters, I have mentioned by name various members of Madame Vestris's company at the Olympic and Covent Garden Theatres. On the other hand, the production, under her management, of *Romeo and Juliet*, at Covent Garden, in 1839, is, of course, quite imaginary.

FOREWORD

AT the risk of being tedious I have attempted to make those of my characters who are Quakers talk as such; also to make a distinction between the Plain Friend who would, for instance, say, "Thou canst," and the less meticulous Quaker who would merely say "thee can."

For guidance in this matter I have referred to the *The Gurneys of Earlham* by Augustus Hare.

A. L.

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I WOULD like to express my thanks to Mr. Charles Berry who suggested the brands of Champagne most popular in the 1930's; also to Mr. A. S. Bridgland for his information regarding men's dress in the same period. To Mr. Dermot Morrah for his excellent list of reading material. To Miss Helen Waddell for some valuable suggestions and to Mr. and Mrs. Alan Cameron because I have borrowed their cat. To Mr. Clarke-Smith.

And my very special thanks to Mr. E. V. Lucas who will know why.

A. L.

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CHAPTER ONE

At the Play

ON a mild, showery evening in April the pit of Drury Lane Theatre was crowded to capacity. So, in fact, was every part of the house. The attraction was Madame Vestris as Macheath, a part which she had previously declared her intention of never playing again; but, since, in the theatrical profession, "last" appearances are seldom final, there had been no great surprise when the lady changed her mind. On the other hand there was considerable rejoicing. Vestris brought to the part a dash and sparkle all her own, and to-night her first entrance was greeted with enthusiasm by the entire audience and by the gallery with howls of joy.

Sitting well to the front of the pit, a boy of nearly eleven years old leant forward; his cheeks were scarlet, his eyes seemed almost to start out of his head. As it was Charles Baron's first visit to the theatre, Drury Lane, even before the curtain rose, had seemed to him a kind of paradise. In his case, a forbidden one.

To most of us, the mere interior of a theatre is strangely fascinating. Even the drawbacks—a persistent smell of oranges mingling with that of gas, tallow and an aroma of dust; the great press of humanity under emotion; the shuffling of feet and rustling of play-bills; the chitter-chatter of the boxes; the noisy impatience of the pit—all these, as one awaits the rise of the curtain, first acquire a dream-like quality and are then merged into the pattern of the play itself. And if even experienced playgoers can feel this tingling anticipation, how much more will it infect a small boy seeing his first play and risking thereby the most extreme parental displeasure.

Charles owed his evening's entertainment to Thomas Ford,

one of his father's footmen. Thomas, a lanky, snub-nosed young man, was a great favourite with Charles Baron. The footman, besides being a devotee of the theatre and having an immense repertoire of popular ballads, was almost always in love; and he had many harrowing tales to tell of the heartlessness and duplicity of women. He had proposed to take with him that night to Drury Lane a fair deceiver named Clara, who at the eleventh hour had treated him most cruelly. On the very afternoon of the day chosen for their outing she had sent him a message by her sister cancelling the engagement, with a rider that it would not be necessary for Thomas to call on her again, and all this, because on their last expedition together—to the Eagle—he had, as she put it, made sheep's eyes at a young woman in pink.

Poor Thomas was disappointed and deeply hurt. "If she 'ad only faced me with it at the time," he had said to Charles, "and not pretended that bygones was to be bygones. And then to wait to break hoff till my evening hout! When she knew, too, that I 'ad horders for the pit! Sly is what she's been. Sly all through."

It was perhaps his gloom even more than his good nature that had induced Thomas to take Charles with him to Drury Lane; had his mind been less stunned by the shock of this most one-sided quarrel, he would hardly have risked the rage of his employer, John Baron, Charles's father and a strict Quaker, should the escapade be discovered. Charles was blithely positive that it would not be. His father, out of town on business, was not expected back until the following day. The expedition would be quite easy to arrange, for, even if the worst came to the worst and Charles and Thomas were heard coming in, why then Charles's step-sister Margaret would square matters. For him, Margaret would square anything. And so, after a great deal of persuasion and a promised bribe of all Charles's pocket money for the next four weeks, the dejected and harassed Thomas had agreed.

They had not left Mr. Baron's house in Bryanston Square

together, meeting by arrangement at a short distance away. Charles said he would manage his escape from the house, and he had managed it, although Thomas did not yet know how this had been done.

Now they were together in the pit; well in the front of it, too, for Thomas, in the break-neck struggle for places, had revealed both cunning and strength. And Charles, normally a fastidious little boy, had failed to notice that the fat man on one side of him smelled strongly of gin or that the knees of an even fatter woman behind were driving into his back; that the place was too hot and the air by no means fresh; or that he was sitting among a class of people his father's son was not permitted to associate with. Nor was he troubled by the thought that it was both wicked and worldly to be sitting in a theatre at all. He had often enough heard these words used in connection with the stage, and had supposed vaguely that there must be some truth in them, even though his Ellesmere cousins were sometimes taken to the play with no apparently alarming results to their morals. But, now that he was actually inside Drury Lane, Charles knew that there could not be anything wrong about his being there. He was enjoying himself, and what he enjoyed he believed implicitly to be right; a state of mind which proved him more of an average boy than a conventional Quaker.

When the curtain rose, the stage had revealed, to Charles at any rate, a kind of super-fairyland. *The Beggar's Opera* does not call for any great elaboration of scenery, but to the little boy leaning forward in the pit, what he saw was perfection. Romance come true. The songs, the dances, the dresses, the jokes, the painting of the women's faces, put a spell upon him which was broken only by a stronger enchantment. The enchantment of Vestris herself. Charles had seen pretty women; he thought his sister Margaret beautiful. But he had never before seen a woman making deliberate use of her beauty. Vestris might, and did, play Macheath with an assumption of masculine swagger, but the tall hat set at a jaunty angle, the

neat cravat and waistcoat, the coat whose cut would satisfy a dandy, and the fine white trousers, could not make a man of her. She remained an adorable woman. She sang, so Charles thought, superbly. She was the most fascinating person he had ever seen. Above all, she was an actress, one of those exciting and mysterious creatures who seem to have no place in everyday life at all.

All the while that he followed the play, applauded and admired, Charles was thinking how wonderful it would be to be up on the stage, to wear elegant clothes, to rouge one's face, to move an audience to cheers or tears or laughter. Wonderful to be Vestris! Wonderful even to be the least important of the actors and thus to know Vestris. And it was perhaps his romantic longing for even a bowing acquaintance with this celebrated lady that there and then crystallised in Charles the determination to be an actor himself.

It was over at last, and far too soon. For the last time Vestris, no longer the debonair highwayman, but ravishing in her own satin dress covered with a rich shawl, had crossed, smiling and bowing, from one stage-door to the other. For the last time she had looked, as Charles fondly imagined, towards a certain seat in the pit. Then she was gone. The lights were turned out, the audience were pushing into the street, and Charles and Thomas were faced by the lengthy business of returning to Bryanston Square. It had begun to rain a little; conveyances for hire were few and far between. There was, in fact, nothing for it but to walk. Thomas, fond of his comfort, gazed enviously at the carriages which, drawn up outside the theatre, waited to take the gentry home. But Charles did not care. He would not have cared had some one suggested he might fly. He was still in a daze.

Thomas, however, was in no such thing. To him the play had seemed much as any other play; in his love-lorn condition the charms of Madame Vestris had left him cold. The rain and the prospect of a long walk reduced his already sunken spirits to such an exceedingly low ebb, that he began to feel

very much alarmed at what he had done. In the first place, the Baron children were not allowed any undue familiarity with servants, always excepting Farren, the butler, their old nurse, and the housekeeper, Hannah, who were in a class apart. In the second place, as Thomas knew perfectly well, John Baron disapproved strongly of the theatre and would never allow any of his children, not even Miss Margaret, who was twenty-three and the possessor of a private income, to go there. The footman's offence in taking Charles with him to-night had therefore been a double one. Should the escapade come to Mr. Baron's ears, he would lose his place. And Thomas did not want to lose it. He was very comfortable, the food was abundant, the wages satisfactory. There was also a new housemaid, a pretty one called Molly, who might, should Clara remain heartless, console him. No, Thomas did not want to lose his place. As he and Charles made their way through Long Acre towards Oxford Street, he remarked with some feeble attempt at severity, "You shouldn't hought to 'ave done this, Master Charles. You really shouldn't."

"Done what?" Charles asked dreamily.

"You didn't hought to 'ave got round me so. If the master 'ears of it——"

"Why should he hear of it?" Dragged back from fairyland, Charles was impatient. "He's away and thee knows it. Even if they found the body, Margaret will see to it that no one blabs."

"The body, Master Charles," repeated Thomas rather faintly. It did not seem impossible to one in his gloomy frame of mind that Charles had, in order to escape from the house, committed a murder.

"Didn't I tell thee about that?" Charles asked carelessly.

"No, Master Charles. You never said nothing about a body."

"Oh, well, it was just a good idea of mine. I asked to go to bed early. Said I had a headache and didn't want any dinner." He began to chuckle.

"Well, Master Charles?"

"I undressed myself and went to bed for a little bit—just so as not to be telling a lie. And then I got up and made a body. You know, a pillow with my nightshirt on, and I took the wig off one of Janey's old dolls for hair. It looked famous, exactly like me asleep. And if any one peeped in and saw that I was asleep they wouldn't trouble to come up to the bed, would they? No one except Margaret, that is, and she was gone to dine at Cousin Samuel Ellesmere's."

"There's Master William John," suggested Thomas.

"William John," Charles contemptuously dismissed his elder brother. "Who cares for William John? Even if he did come near the bed and see the body wasn't me, he'd not blab. I'll say this for William John. He never blabs."

To Thomas's simple mind the body scheme began to appear rather a clever one. It was true enough, with the mistress being such an invalid, that no one except Miss Margaret would be likely to go to the boys' bedroom. Charles and his brother were too old now for Nurse Cox's supervision. They put themselves to bed. Thomas also knew that William John was no tell-tale. As for Miss Margaret, even if she did visit her brother on returning home, did not the whole household know how she worshipped him? How clever she was at hiding his scrapes from the master? No, it was all right. Master Charles had managed the affair most smartly.

Thomas, having discarded the fear of dismissal, began to take Charles into his confidence and to harp on the unkindness of Clara. Charles, for once, did not want to listen. He had enjoyed explaining to Thomas about the body, but now he wanted to slip back into his dreams again. He wanted to dance with Vestris on a lighted stage, to lead her out in triumph through the stage door while an audience cheered and shouted.

"It's not so much the money I've spent on Clara, Master Charles," Thomas rambled on plaintively. "I'm not one to begrudge it. Leastways, not to a female. It's the 'ardness of

'er 'eart, Master Charles. And the slyness! Why couldn't she 'ave faced me with it at the time? *Why?*"

"I don't know," said Charles.

"Well," Thomas announced surprisingly, "*I* do. I was treating 'er, see? We was hout for the hevening, and the hevening wasn't hover. Clara was always one for 'er money's worth. So she pretended bygones was to be bygones. See, Master Charles? That's where the slyness of it comes in."

"Yes," said Charles, "I see." He didn't see, and he hadn't heard very much either. But he was always civil to his inferiors. As Charles's reading of this word meant all those who were not in a position to order him about, and as he had good reason for regarding neither Nurse Cox nor the butler as inferiors, he was by no means always civil to them; but to the footmen and younger maid-servants he was courteous and friendly. They all loved him.

Bryanston Square was not far off now, for Charles and Thomas had walked quickly; there were few people about to get in their way, and the rain, an April shower, had ceased. Drawing near home, they walked even faster, until, with Thomas still moaning about Clara and Charles still dreaming about Vestris, they reached the square. Thomas, being a man-servant, was, on his night out, allowed a key to the area door. (Owing to Mr. Baron's belief that no good woman should be abroad later than ten o'clock, the maids were not.) As Charles and Thomas approached the house, the footman stopped suddenly, gripped Charles by the arm and made a kind of gurgling noise in his throat.

"What's the matter?" Charles asked.

"Look, Master Charles. The master's study."

Charles looked. Sure enough, the window of his father's particular and private room was brightly lit. There could be but one explanation. No member of the household took liberties with that room. John Baron had returned!

Charles was afraid of his father. But to-night he was in an exalted frame of mind. The wonder and brilliance of the

theatre had transformed him into an entirely different boy from the one who had, a few hours earlier, slipped furtively from the house. He had seen fine sights, sights that his father knew nothing whatever about. Instead of fear, he felt superiority.

"Come on," he said to Thomas, who was shrinking back. "Come on. Perhaps he won't hear us."

"No, Master Charles. I can't. By God, I can't! I'll lose my place."

"Thee'll lose it just as soon if thee doesn't come in all night."

"But, Master Charles——" Thomas began to burble. "Don't you see, Master Charles? Me coming in with you like that. The master——"

"All right," Charles interrupted. The complete collapse of Thomas gave him a feeling of power. He snatched at the key which the footman held limply in his hand. "Give me that. Thee lost it because I took it. Can thee remember? Now go and walk about and come back later. Thee will have to knock on the door. Go on." And he gave Thomas a push.

"But, Master Charles——"

"Go on." Charles pushed again and harder. Thomas began slowly to walk away. When he looked round Charles was disappearing down the area steps.

"S'truth!" muttered Thomas with sincere admiration.

Charles unlocked the kitchen door. There was a dim light inside, left by the friendly cook, and some bread and cheese set out on the kitchen table for Thomas's refreshment. Charles, for the first time in his life, resisted quite easily the temptation to eat between meals. He passed through the kitchen, climbed the basement stairs and reached the hall. There, too, a lamp burned faintly, a sure sign his father knew that he was out. The servants, when retiring late, were expected to light themselves to bed with a candle.

Charles tiptoed across the hall even while something told him that it was fruitless to tiptoe. In spite of this he started

upstairs as quietly as possible. But not quietly enough. The door of his father's study was at the head of the first flight, and Charles was only about half-way up when this door opened. John Baron, the room's bright light behind him, stood on the threshold. "Is that thou, Charles?" he asked.

"Yes, Papa," said Charles.

"I have been sitting up for thee. Come in here."

There was no escape. Charles, after mounting the stairs as slowly as possible, went into the study. John Baron stood with his back to the handsome mantelpiece. A small but bright fire burned in the grate.

"Where hast thou been?" The question was shot at the little boy, but before he could answer it, John Baron observed that the door was open, a thing which always provoked him. "Shut the door, Charles," he said.

And as Charles obeyed, the question was rapped at him again. "Where hast thou been?"

Without any plausible explanation for his movements, and still a little exalted by his visit to Drury Lane, Charles blundered into the truth. "To the play."

"To the *play*?"

"Yes."

"Who took thee?"

"Nobody."

"Thou wentest alone? Come, Charles, speak the truth. Who took thee?"

"Nobody took me," Charles repeated doggedly.

John Baron was very angry. He was also fatigued after the hurried journey he had taken in order to arrive home that night instead of on the following day. He could never accustom himself to Charles's outrageous disobedience. He was sure his son was lying about having been out alone, although, supposing his companion to have been some other boy, he did not suspect any of the servants. The possibility that Charles might be shielding some one conveyed no particular appeal to John. A lie was a lie. The thing he was least shocked about, though

Charles could not know this, was his son's having been to the play. John, before joining the ranks of Plain Friends, had enjoyed the theatre himself and he was still a great lover of Shakespeare. This sneaking interest in the drama prompted another question. "What play hast thou been to?"

"To Drury Lane. To see"—Charles's voice grew husky at the name—"Vestris."

"Vestris!" exclaimed John Baron, with a swiftness betraying some knowledge of theatrical doings. "A woman who made her name by dressing as a man! A vulgar mountebank! A singer of frivolous songs! Not even a serious actress!"

"She is a serious actress," retorted Charles. He was indignant. "She's a *great* actress. She's beautiful and she's——"

"That is enough, Charles. Go to bed. I shall whip thee in the morning."


Charles turned to go. As so often happened in these angry scenes, his fear was mixed with contempt. His father might be an important banker, but he knew nothing; he could not even understand about greatness and beauty. He was a fool.

Charles had his hand on the door knob when John Baron called him back. "Come here. I shall whip thee now." John did not want to do this. He was not only exhausted from the journey, but he was weary of these constant encounters with his younger son. Why could not Charles be like William John, whom it was seldom necessary to rebuke, much less to whip? And why, since the boy was so ill-behaved, need he be so handsome? And so insolent with it? Better to punish him now, late though it was, than to wait till the morning and have Margaret attempting to interfere. With all her good sense in other directions, with regard to Charles, his dearly loved elder daughter was a mere doting fool. John Baron sighed and opened the drawer of the desk where he kept the birch rod.

Very slowly Charles moved away from the door. He, too, felt tired. But he was looking insolent. There was no denying it. His blue eyes had dislike in them as well as disdain. And yet, inside himself, he was frightened of the pain of being

punished. He wanted Margaret. He wanted to cry, and beg his father not to hurt him.

John, regarding his son sombrely, struck with the weary droop of his body, wished that the child would show some sign of repentance or even of fear. For a moment he had the inclination to lay the birch rod aside. It was long after midnight, they both needed sleep. But suddenly the enchantment of his evening at the theatre swept over Charles, supporting him with its magic. He squared his shoulders. And, with a proud look that angered his father afresh, he advanced, saying a little shakily to himself, "Vestris is worth a whipping."



CHAPTER TWO

The Barons

THE footman's part in Charles's expedition to Drury Lane was never discovered. Or rather, it was never brought to the notice of his master. Thomas had not dared to risk Charles's plan of rousing the household on the pretext of having lost his key; instead, he had wandered about the streets until morning, when, very early, he slunk down the area steps. Indeed, but for what he considered the inspiration of Charles's heroic conduct, Thomas would probably not have returned at all. As it was, he tapped on the scullery window to attract the attention of the kitchenmaid, who had just come downstairs to light the fire. This girl, a humble admirer of his, readily opened the door; but as she did so, Thomas observed, bewildered, that the key had been left in the lock; an afterthought on the part of Charles which would have been more useful had it occurred to him beforehand. But Thomas bore him no malice.

The little kitchenmaid, who could not resist boasting of this early encounter, caused by her innocent vanity some gossip among the servants. Alfred, the second footman, who shared Thomas's room, made a sly reference to the hours he kept, and this, with other whispers, reached the ear of the housekeeper, Hannah Martin. Hannah was not lenient with the servants' shortcomings; nor was she fond of the butler, of whom she was very jealous, and hearing of Thomas's misdemeanour before Farren did, she eagerly invaded his province by reporting the matter to Margaret Baron.

John Baron's wife, Sophia, had for many years now considered herself an invalid, and it was Margaret, therefore, who ranked, after her father, as head of the household. If no

domestic problems were ever taken to Mrs. Baron, few failed eventually to reach her step-daughter; Hannah in particular relying on her young mistress's discretion and judgment. On this occasion the housekeeper enlarged on the iniquity of Thomas, and on Farren's slackness, urging Margaret to bring the matter to her father's notice. But she met with a disappointment.

"No, Hannah," Margaret said decisively, "we will not trouble my father. Thee can send Thomas to me."

Hannah looked shocked; she did not think it suitable for a young unmarried woman to deal directly in such serious matters with a manservant. "It would be better to speak to the master," she advised.

"Do as I tell thee, Hannah. Send Thomas to me. I have something to say to him."

Hannah grumbled but obeyed, and after a few minutes Thomas, looking very sheepish, came into Margaret's sitting-room.

"I hear that thee was out all night, Thomas," she began.

"I—yes, Miss Margaret. I——"

"Thee need not explain. I think thee was out with Master Charles."

First Thomas went pale, then he went red. His mouth remained open but he said nothing at all.

"I *know* thee was out with Master Charles," went on Margaret, her voice growing harder. "But do not think that he has told me tales. I heard what happened last night, and I know thee has often talked to Master Charles about the theatres, so I can guess easily enough that you went there together."

"Yes, Miss Margaret," mumbled Thomas.

She looked at him scornfully. "My brother was punished, but I suppose thee will go scot-free because he refused to tell my father whom he had been with."

"Y—yes, Miss Margaret."

"I shall not tell either. But thee had better understand

this. If thee should lead my brother into mischief again I will have thee dismissed. And without a character too. Now thee can go."

"Y-yes, Miss Margaret." The wretched Thomas retreated, still keeping intact his vast admiration for Charles, to whom he ever afterwards devoted himself in the most doglike manner.

And John Baron, absent-minded for once, omitted to inquire about the key.

John Baron had not always been so serious a Quaker; as a younger man, during the happy years of his first marriage, religion had vexed him very little, and he had found it permissible, Meeting once over, to enjoy himself.

His first wife, Margaret Ellesmere, was an orphan, brought up in her uncle's household and possessing a comfortable income of her own, which was now her daughter's portion. John's marriage, however, was not one of convenience; belonging as he did to a famous banking family, there was no need to marry for money, and he was deeply in love with Margaret Ellesmere. They were married in the spring of 1804.

Margaret was not at first glance a beauty. But she was charming. Her portrait by Opie, still in John's study, showed her as slender, with a delicate complexion, a mouth both sweet and firm, and humorous, candid eyes. Margaret had been almost constantly amused. And she had speedily taught her husband that, in order to be good, one need not also be gloomy. She and her family were Quakers of the most tolerant type; they liked to enjoy themselves and did so; they were ready to see virtue in opinions that differed from their own. They were cultured, gay and kind, and John Baron, whose immediate relatives thought of little outside money-making and morality, benefited greatly from the Ellesmere influence.

At the time of their marriage Margaret was three-and-twenty; her husband was five years older and already a partner in his father's bank. He was handsome in his burly way, with

a fresh-coloured face, broad shoulders and an expression inclined to be critical. His temper was short, and he was, for so young a man, extremely prejudiced, a failing which, after his marriage to Margaret, began gradually to disappear. Nobody knew how the miracle was accomplished, for not even the young couple's closest intimates ever heard Margaret contradict or make game of her husband in public; nor could she be drawn in private into any discussion of John's character or eccentricities. Margaret Baron was too completely mistress of her own life and of her husband's heart to need a confidante.

Margaret the second, the only child of this marriage, was not born until 1807. John had sometimes half-heartedly deplored their childlessness, but Margaret, who thought for herself, expressed frank pleasure that no third person had come to interrupt her happiness. She felt it no sin to want her husband's undivided attention, and when at last she became pregnant the knowledge filled her with a queer foreboding. She was active, loving to ride and to walk, almost worshipping fresh air, and she learned John's views on the correct existence for a woman in her condition with dismay; he ordered her to lie for hours on a sofa, to be almost constantly indoors, to take no exercise more violent than a walk round the garden of Bryanston Square. The Barons had been in the habit of spending the summer at Longdale, the Sussex home of Margaret's first cousin, Richard Ellesmere, but when John found that Priscilla, Richard's wife, sympathised with Margaret's revolt against an invalid life, he at once curtailed their visit.

He was obstinately determined that his wife should be cared for and his child born to the accompaniment of everything which he personally believed correct and proper.

The months went by. Margaret lived in rooms that were always too close. Her limbs grew weak from lack of exercise. She ate more food than she wanted, and during John's daily absence at the bank was bored by women callers, all avidly describing their own recollections of childbirth. A fashionable doctor was engaged, who charged a great deal of money for

very little advice, all of it contrary to Margaret's own inclination. She complained that they were turning her into a doll and a dull doll at that; but her love for John, rather than any rigid notion of a wife's duty, forced her to acquiesce.

When her child was born Margaret died. John was stunned, the doctor puzzled and almost angry. He could hardly credit the loss of his patient. John added self-reproach to his deep sorrow, fearing quite honestly that Margaret had lacked sufficient care; and as Priscilla Ellesmere compassionately held her tongue, he never knew how his young wife had pined and fretted on her superfluous sofa. It came so easily to him to consider his own ideas the right ones that, against all proof, he continued to cling to this belief.

The baby Margaret, her father immediately loved. His grief, though bitter, was not unreasonable, for unlike so many bereaved husbands he did not blame the child for her mother's death. Richard and Priscilla Ellesmere offered to bring Margaret up with their own children, but John could not bear his daughter out of his sight; he found immense consolation in arranging her life, procuring the best foster-mother and nurse that money could hire, and filling the nurseries at Bryanston Square with every conceivable luxury.

Not for six years did John give his child a step-mother. No woman he met would stand comparison with Margaret, his work absorbed him and the name of Baron stood increasingly high. Whatever time he could spare from bank business was given to his daughter, of whom he made a close companion, regaling every unwary listener with her sayings, fretting constantly about her health, yet never wholly succeeding in spoiling her. No matter how tired or preoccupied he might be, the little girl could amuse him, could, when they played together, make him a boy again. He loved her intensely. She loved him with a mature tenderness flavoured with indulgence.

Margaret was just seven when her father, travelling on business to Luton, was entertained there by a Quaker family

called Huntley. The youngest daughter, Sophia, was very pretty. She was also very silly, but John Baron won her too swiftly to discover this. Sophia, weary of a restricted provincial life and of the narrow piety of her home circle, longed secretly to marry into the "world," and as John, a rich and apparently tolerant Quaker, seemed the next best thing, she affected the most artless admiration for him. She was the type for whom a man long starved of passion and wifely tenderness might easily fall. And so she captured John Baron. He married her only a few weeks after their first meeting, speedily wondering at himself for doing so.

Margaret did not resent the intrusion of her step-mother; she had small reason to, since her own close intimacy with John remained uninterrupted. Sophia had little experience of children. In fact, she feared them, although it formed part of her equipment as a young lady to pretend an adoration for the little creatures. She was relieved to find her step-daughter so tractable, and came soon enough to rely on the child's companionship almost as much as John did. For poor Sophia's marriage proved a disappointment. Her meagre education did not help her to mix with her husband's circle; she had read little, she could not talk brightly or well, and in spite of the kindness of the Ellesmeres she felt that most visitors to the house despised her. Still worse, the gaieties of London eluded her, for she found other and less congenial pastimes. Her first baby, William John, was born only ten months after her wedding day, and in each of the four successive years Sophia gave birth to children. Of these, only Janey, born two years after her elder brother, and Charles, born two years after Janey, survived. Sophia's health was wrecked.

When, after the birth of Charles, John Baron received warning of the dangers of a further pregnancy, he was contemptuous rather than compassionate. The death of his beloved Margaret still seemed heroic tragedy, but the inability of Sophia to produce more than two living sons and a daughter without becoming an invalid merely displeased him. He did

not love her; she had become a haggard shadow of her pretty self. The fuss and tears attendant on her confinements irked him, but he still desired as his due a normal married life. Although virtuous, he was of strong passions, and his wife had failed him; she had taken refuge behind the doctors who prophesied that another child would kill her. Short, therefore, of becoming a murderer or taking a mistress, John Baron was condemned to a celibate existence.

The little Charles, delicate at first, soon began to thrive, becoming, in the opinion of his step-sister Margaret, a remarkably handsome baby. When he was only a few months old, William John and Janey took the measles, a complaint which Margaret had already been through and which Charles escaped. With Sophia ill downstairs and two fretful children up in the nursery, even John Baron's excellent nurses became crotchety and harassed, and the first news of this confusion was brought to him by Margaret. She was now twelve years old, breakfasted each morning with her father and made his tea, having already learned to take charge of the many household matters that were neglected by poor Sophia.

"Papa," she began one morning as she handed him his cup.

"Well, my love?" John, absorbed in *The Times*, did look up to refresh himself with a glance at Margaret's face. It was growing so very like her mother's.

"It is about Charles, Papa."

"Charles?" For a second John was vague. His son was so new an arrival that he had momentarily forgotten his name.

"Yes, Charles. Baby."

"Ah, yes, of course. Young Master Baby. And what about him? He has not taken the measles, I trust?"

"Oh, no. Not that. But thee knows that Mrs. Clark will be leaving soon." Mrs. Clark was the wet-nurse.

"Will she indeed? An excellent woman. We must remember to make her a present. Something really handsome."

"I'll not forget, Papa. But I was thinking of after Mrs.

Clark has left. Nurse Cox and Hester will have a great deal to do."

"They are well paid for it. But if thee thinks we need another nursemaid, we must have one." John had already fallen into the habit of consulting his small daughter on domestic points.

"No," Margaret said emphatically, "we do not need another nursemaid. I want thee to allow me to look after Charles."

"Thee? Why, bless thy heart, child! Does thee wish to force an economy on me?"

"No, indeed, Papa. It has nothing to do with money. Only, I love Charles. So very much."

"Thee loves him, eh? More than thee loves William John and Janey?" John did not ask this question playfully but in earnest. He was always keenly interested in the workings of Margaret's mind.

She hesitated before saying, "Yes, I think so. A little. He is such a beautiful baby. And he is so very fond of me."

"At his age?"

"He is always good with me, Papa. Better than with Mrs. Clark. And he always holds his hands out when I go up to him. Almost as if he were my own baby."

If John looked a little sadly at his daughter, he spoke cheerfully. "His good taste has formed young, then. By all means adopt thy brother, love."

"Oh, Papa! Does thee really mean that? May I really wash and dress him and choose what he is to wear and everything?"

"Why not, child? That is, within reason. I can trust thee not to tire thyself nor to offend good Nurse Cox?"

"Indeed I won't do that. Nurse has so much to do for William John and Janey that she'll be glad of me. And I'll take her advice, of course."

"Thee would do well to!" laughed John Baron. "Now come and help me into my hat and coat." And he drove away to the City, having agreed to Margaret's whim and arranged

Charles's future without giving so much as one thought to his wife, Sophia. And yet it is unjust to Margaret to call it a whim.

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As the Baron children grew older their father grew more religious. Tied to a nervous, unintelligent invalid, he found no solace for his hours of leisure; while Margaret, although he loved her as dearly as ever, could not always be with him. She was so much occupied between her lessons and little Charles that often, in her effort to sit up in the evenings with her father, she would nod with sleep.

It was, in a sense, almost as a distraction that John at first became a Plain Quaker. The required formality of dress and speech interested him; the opportunities for entertaining notable Friends, those who travelled in the ministry, missionaries and philanthropists, flattered his self-importance. And, by bringing to the study of doctrine the same precision he employed at banking, he might have been happy, had his conscience not forced on him an attempt to convert his children. The family, although not obliged to dress or speak as Plain Quakers, was encircled by piety and discouraged from all enjoyment, for John, with a bigot's zeal, hoped by such means to induce his younger children in time to think as he did. With Margaret he was more urgent; he wished her to follow him in all things, and the discovery of a lack of religious fervour in his favourite child wounded him deeply. Margaret was wounded too. The unrelieved company of earnest Friends, the constant prayers and Bible readings, seemed to take her father from her; she missed his cheerfulness, his interest in pleasant trivialities. And while there was no actual breach, John, in finding religion, lost something of his daughter's heart. The brightness of their relationship faded.

Because the Ellesmeres formed a link with his dead wife, John continued on friendly terms with them; deploring their frivolity, he endured it for her sake. Also, they were useful to him, and for this reason—he had, in view of Sophia's poor

health and domestic incompetence, decided against opening an establishment in the country, keeping instead to his practice of spending the summer months at Longdale, Richard Ellesmere's house in Sussex.

Richard and Priscilla had ten children. The household was noisy, good-tempered and merry, so it was hardly surprising that the young Barons looked forward most eagerly to their holidays at Longdale, where rosy-faced Cousin Priscilla treated them almost as her own sons and daughters, and where life seemed as different as possible from the quiet severity of Bryanston Square.

For several years, while Sophia's children were still young, John was involved deeply in the widespread financial crisis. Baron's Bank, unlike so many others, came through the dangerous period unscathed. But John, who would not have found religion a consolation for financial failure, suffered an anxiety which did not improve his temper. To the Baron children, God and the banking business were both almost equally bogeys.

William John, the eldest of Sophia's family, was naturally docile; a good-natured little boy, fragile and rather timid, always anxious to please. Because of his delicacy, he was his mother's favourite; in fact, the only one of her children in whom she took an active interest. When she had discussed her own symptoms until they wearied even herself, she would turn gratefully to William John's, and such authority as she ever troubled to exert lay in the direction of coddling her elder son. Janey was too robust to please her. And Janey was wilful; she was pretty too, and soon discovered that pertness, allied to fair ringlets and blue eyes, made older people lenient. When in a good humour, John was inclined to make much of Janey.

Pretty, Janey might be, but Charles was the beauty of the family, a distinction that did not make his little sister love him the more. The boy not only grew handsome but healthy, active, intelligent and full of high spirits, possessing indeed

all those qualities that a man most desires in his son. Yet when Charles was little more than a baby, his father, for a most unworthy reason, began to treat him severely.

John, had he read his own mind, would have admitted that he grudged Margaret's love for Charles. At first it had given him pleasure to watch the girl's tenderness for her little brother. With the big rosy baby in her arms he thought his daughter more charming than ever; he was amused by her matronly ways, the gravity with which she gave her orders concerning Charles, her game of being his mother. And had John loved his wife or cared as deeply for the other children as he did for Margaret, this amusement might have continued. But it did not. In its place grew up a kind of furtive, unacknowledged jealousy. John believed himself neglected. And his rival was a baby!

This jealousy showed itself clearly for the first time when Charles was only three years old. One Saturday afternoon the children were with their father in his study, and he, in an unusually easy frame of mind, had allowed some of his big books to be taken to build houses of, and sat watching his family with an indulgent pleasure. They made a pretty group. Margaret knelt on the floor beside the younger ones. She was fifteen now, almost a woman, and her dress, a silvery grey brightened with cherry ribbons, gave her maturity. Her soft, dark hair recalled her mother's.

John, in his arm-chair by the fire, enjoyed a reverie in which the young girl kneeling on the floor became the woman whose memory still stirred his passions, and the very sweetness of this waking dream made him resent all the more bitterly an interruption. But a dispute broke out loudly among the children. Charles had gripped one end of a large volume, Janey clutched tightly at the other. William John's hand, too, although with less decision, was on the book.

"Let go, Charles. I want it." Janey's voice was shrill.

"No," said Charles.

"I want it. Let go. Thee must let go."

"No." Although Charles did not yet speak plainly, his command over this particular monosyllable was perfect. He hung on to the book like grim death, then, with a skilful jerk, pulled it away from Janey altogether.

"Pig!" screamed the little girl; she burst into tears.

"Do not be selfish, Janey," Margaret said. "There are plenty of other books. Charles had this one first."

Janey cried louder than ever, while Charles, with a chuckle of joy, smiled up at his step-sister so engagingly that Margaret hugged him to her, bending her graceful head to kiss him. John, watching, and shaken with an unaccountable misery, expressed it in anger. "Thou art a fool, Margaret," he said roughly, "to pamper and indulge that child so. A boy should give in to his sister. Look how poor Janey is crying. Come here, my pet, come here."

Margaret looked up, startled by her father's violence. He had never spoken so to her before. Janey, delighted at such unexpected support, ran to John, pausing only to put out her tongue at Charles. William John remained placidly puzzled, but Charles, drawing a little closer to Margaret, favoured his father with a long, grave stare. It seemed to the man's nervous imagination that his son's unsmiling eyes defied him.

With a sudden gust of rage he turned on Margaret. "Take the spoiled brat away," he said. "He has learned to be impudent already. I shall buy thee a lapdog to-morrow, miss, to squander thy affection on. Charles is a boy, remember, not a doll!"

Margaret rose, lifting her brother in her arms. "He is a baby," she said quietly; her eyes, hurt and surprised, reproached her father, and, already half-ashamed, he mumbled, "Well, well, that may be so. But thou must not over-indulge him. Stay here if thou wishest, child."

"No, sir," Margaret answered. "Thee ordered me to take him away."

She left the room with Charles, and John felt a strange chill come over him. Never before had Margaret called him "sir."

CHAPTER THREE

The Ellesmeres

LATE June of that year saw the death of King George IV., an event which was little discussed in the Baron family, for John, although considering it the duty of all Englishmen to be loyal, also considered his late Majesty a pattern of everything a man should not be. He therefore, as much as possible, held his tongue on the subject. The children picked up a certain amount of gossip from the servants, who, like all their kind, professed a close acquaintance with Court doings, and they learned in the kitchen that the new King, William, was jumping for joy at having stepped at last into his brother's shoes. The housemaid, Molly, walking down St. James's Street a few days after King George's funeral, had, without at first knowing what the fuss was about, joined an excited crowd and had discerned finally in the middle of it a smiling, elderly gentleman, certainly well-dressed but in no other way remarkable. What was her astonishment to learn from the shouts of the people that this was none other than His Majesty King William IV., who had been recognised while taking an informal stroll. Molly described this adventure to Hester, the schoolroom maid, keeping till the end the cream of the incident which came when a woman had pushed her way through the throng and actually kissed His Majesty full upon the cheek. "Kissed him!" gasped Hester. "Why, the shameless hussy!"

"That's just what she was," Molly agreed eagerly, "she was nothing but a——" She stopped abruptly and Hester blushed.

"Nothing but a what?" demanded Janey, who was listening. Janey was thirteen now. Still pretty and very inquisitive.

"Never mind, miss," said Hester quickly. She knew that such loose talk should be stopped, but Molly's story of the King and an unmentionable woman was strangely fascinating.

"Don't be silly, Hester," said Janey. "Molly started to say something. Why doesn't she finish? What was the woman nothing but?"

"Now, Miss Janey," muttered Hester, looking foolish.

Molly was less mealy-mouthed; she was also far less in awe than Hester was of Janey's father. For Molly, a smart, pretty girl, could get a place anywhere. "She was nothing but a bad woman, Miss Janey," she said.

"Bad? In what way? How could thee know she was bad? Thee had never seen her before."

"She had paint on her face, miss. That was enough for me. And to kiss a man in the open street like that! A man she didn't even know!"

"He wasn't a man, he was the King," said Janey, as if excusing everything. "That made a difference. I would like to kiss the King myself." There was no false virtue in Janey.

Later in July the Baron family left London for Sussex. John went with them, stayed a few days at Longdale and then returned, until August, to London to complete some affairs. With relief, all four of his children watched his departure; the younger ones because they feared more than they loved him; Margaret because she dreaded his constant clashes with Charles. As for Sophia, his wife, engrossed by ill health, John's absence or presence made little difference to her. But she did find life somewhat more congenial without him.

Longdale in July was delightful. The garden ablaze with flowers; the lawns glowing like green velvet; the raspberries ripe, the plums and cherries ripening. The Baron children mixed gaily with the Ellesmeres. There were games and laughter and no punishments. Cousin Ellesmere and Cousin Priscilla loved to see happy faces, and only the more dangerous or destructive forms of mischief were forbidden. Margaret

had no household cares to trouble her, while in this tranquil atmosphere even Sophia's complaints grew fainter.

The eldest of the Ellesmere children, Daniel, was a year older than Margaret. The youngest, Martha, just six. In between came Susannah, who was married, Joseph and Caroline, twins of twenty, Amelia, Caleb, Mary Priscilla, Samuel and Robert. Caroline was perhaps the only one who could strictly be called beautiful, but they had, all of them, a sturdy, fair-skinned look of health that was exceedingly attractive. Caleb, just seventeen, a brilliantly clever boy, with parents wise enough to take his education slowly, was the particular friend of William John Baron, who, himself slow and plodding, admired Caleb's easily acquired knowledge. Mary Priscilla, Samuel and Robert, aged respectively fourteen, twelve and ten, were the natural companions of Charles and Janey, while little Martha was the pet and plaything of them all. John Baron's younger children always regarded the Ellesmeres as their cousins, speaking of them as such, although only Margaret could claim a blood relationship.

Priscilla Ellesmere had married at seventeen. She still seemed, for the mother of ten children, very young. She had perfect health and great placidity; her life at Longdale, among her children, her servants, whom she treated almost maternally, and the cottagers, who adored her, formed one long round of happy activity. And Margaret Baron, who loved her cousin, often envied her. Richard, Priscilla's husband, had retired from active business in the city, leaving the affairs of the great merchant house of Ellesmere, Boon & Co., where Daniel was already a junior partner and Joseph a clerk, in the capable hands of his brother Samuel and his brother-in-law, John Boon. Richard's considerable fortune enabled him to live the one life he enjoyed, that of a country gentleman; although easy-natured and by no means a Plain Quaker, he was somewhat more observant of forms than his wife, and, without pressing doctrine upon his children, was intolerant of all irreverence or levity. The married life of Richard and

Priscilla was one of great contentment and mutual affection.

When the Barons arrived at Longdale they found the whole family, excepting Susannah and her husband, and Daniel, who was expected shortly from London, assembled there. As Daniel had but lately returned from a voyage on the firm's business to the West Indies, his cousins had not seen him for more than a year. There were no other visitors in the house, although Cousin Priscilla's younger sister and niece were to join the party later; a prospect most unpleasing to John Baron. For the sake of old associations and out of a sincere regard, he was prepared to overlook what he considered the laxity of the Ellesmere parents, but Mary Clifford he could barely tolerate. She was a good deal younger than her sister Priscilla, had left the Quakers and married into the "world"; her husband having been the younger son of a peer. Now a wealthy widow, she brought up her little daughter, Rose, in the most frivolous manner, and, while claiming membership of the Church of England, in John's opinion lacked any religious sense whatever. He hoped most earnestly that she would have left Longdale before his return there in August.

Longdale, a large house, about four miles from Horsham, was built with comfort and little ostentation. It was three-storied, white, looking out from the back over a magnificent lawn, which, with its smooth, carefully tended grass, its three great cedars and the little lake beyond, was the pride and envy of the whole neighbourhood. The flower and vegetable gardens were, in the Sussex fashion, walled, and lay to one side of the house; on the other was a fine shrubbery, while beyond the lake, a paddock and orchard served as favourite playgrounds for the children. At the front of the house a high wall separated the carriage sweep from a quiet country road.

Indoors, Longdale had none of the stiffness of the Barons' home in London, where even the most innocent disorder was frowned upon. For all its graceful furniture and spotless chintzes, Priscilla's drawing-room never seemed to stand on ceremony, nor close its doors against the children, who romped

unchecked in every part of that hospitable house, and had a large, airy schoolroom for their own special domain. There were horses to ride and dogs to play with, and sometimes dancing in a great room, called the Long Parlour. But in this last amusement the Barons took no part. Their father forbade it.

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Both Margaret Baron and Janey kept journals, but these, unlike the diaries of the Ellesmere sisters, who had no secrets from each other, were private documents, carefully guarded and shown to no one. At Longdale, free from the numerous duties of Bryanston Square, Margaret wrote in her diary with some regularity; Janey, as always, when she felt so inclined.

MARGARET'S DIARY

July 30th. My father left for London early this morning and will return in two weeks' time. I shall feel easier about Charles now that he is away. My brother is at his best here, and I often wish Papa would take note of the gentleness with which Cousin Ellesmere and Cousin Priscilla rule their children. Charles's heart is good, but he cannot endure harsh authority. With the family here, he is most sweet tempered and lovable. Daniel is expected to-morrow. I wonder if his travels have changed him. The day has been very hot, and before retiring we walked out to observe the stars. Caleb has been studying astronomy and had much to tell us.

July 31st. A happy day. Before breakfast, while the younger children were gathering raspberries, I walked in the garden with Cousin Priscilla. How kind she is! She spoke most wisely about Charles, and has promised to speak to my father about him as well. But I do not think this will be successful. Daniel came in the afternoon. Over a year since I have seen him! He is much improved and looks older. I think him handsome now, which my step-mother says is ridiculous. Mrs. Clifford

and Rose came later in the day. The child has grown very pretty but is over-dressed. She is as tall as Janey although she is only eleven, a few months older than Charles. Mrs. Clifford is not an agreeable woman.

August 1st. I fear that Janey is growing bold. She romps with the boys like a hoyden and yet is constantly at her looking-glass. Some of us went riding, and Daniel stayed close to me all the time. But he talked very little. Caroline and Amelia sang delightfully this evening. I love music and see nothing wrong in it.

August 2nd. Charles teased Daniel at breakfast time for looking so solemn. My cousin took this in excellent part but he has continued serious all day. When we are together he is quite silent. I wonder why. I like him most warmly.

August 6th. I have neglected my diary. The days have been so fine and so happy. Yesterday we took a picnic into the woods. Dinner was put back and we stayed out until the evening. Daniel and I walked home together instead of riding in the carriage, and for the first time he seemed to have something to say. He did not speak much of his travels but asked questions about myself. I began to confide in him as I did when we were younger. I suppose he is the only one in whom I can ever do this. Charles is too young and my father grows more and more narrow. I did not say so to Daniel, of course, but I am afraid it is true. Daniel and I spoke of Mrs. Fry, who is a kinswoman of Cousin Priscilla, and of the great work she has done among the women prisoners at Newgate. I remember speaking of her once to Papa and wishing that I, too, could help in such a worthy cause. He was very angry, and is against a woman's doing public work, however charitable. Daniel does not think this, but he believes that only a person as sincerely religious as Mrs. Fry could have surmounted such obstacles. Perhaps he is right. There is no doubt from all one hears that the Gurneys, Mrs. Fry's family, are people of rare quality. I wonder if Daniel would understand my feeling towards religion. He, I am convinced, has perfect faith. I would not

like to sink in his estimation. My liking for him is very strong.

August 7th. Rose Clifford is a little coquette. She does not romp like Janey, and has sweeter manners, but she is always seeking attention from the boys. Charles is her favourite because she cannot make a slave of him. At times he will play with her and tell her secrets; at others he ignores her, which puts her into a pet. It is a pity to have such tricks so young. And yet perhaps the ability to interest men is enviable. There are times when Daniel hardly seems to notice me. At others he seeks me out. I wish I knew what was in his mind, for I am afraid I love him.

August 8th. Why did I write yesterday I am *afraid* I love Daniel? I know I do. I almost believe that he loves me. I suppose I am afraid on account of Charles. How could I leave him? If only my father would let him stay always at Longdale, but I do not think he would do this. He seems to grow more and more distrustful of happiness in others, particularly in my poor Charles. It is so strange that in some people religion destroys all cheerfulness. Cousin Ellesmere and Cousin Priscilla are truly religious, and so, I think, is Daniel. And yet this house is always full of laughter. I know I love Daniel. But I doubt already if he loves me. I fear I have persuaded myself that he does, for the very pleasure of imagining what my life with him would be. It would be so very different from my life at present. I know I am growing discontented, but this may be only the contrast between Longdale and our own home. With Daniel, there would always be the spirit of Longdale. But I am very foolish to dwell on this. I do not begin to know what Daniel's feelings for me are. And I am forgetting Charles.

August 9th. There has been much company to-day. The Leighs drove out from Horsham, bringing a number of young men, some of them officers. James Leigh is, I think, in love with Caroline, and she with him. This should make a most happy marriage. He is handsome and high-spirited, which

should match well with Caroline, but I think he is steady as well. In the evening there was dancing. I found it difficult to keep my promise to my father, for what harm in such an amusement can there possibly be? As I could not dance, Daniel walked with me on the lawn. We stood for some time outside the Long Parlour watching the dancers. They made such a gay picture. Daniel loves to dance, but he would not go in. We talked very little. The younger children stayed up as late as they chose, and we heard Charles laughing and whispering with Rose Clifford in the shrubbery. She is a vain little girl and will do him no good, although I am not surprised that Charles should be her favourite. Janey tells me that she hates her, but I fear this is jealousy. To-night one of the officers paid court to Rose as if she had been a woman. Mrs. Clifford looked pleased, but not Cousin Priscilla, who is not strict, but likes girls of that age to be children. I fear I have neglected Charles. In a little over two weeks now it will be his birthday.

August 10th. My step-mother has been less well to-day and I have spent much time in her room. She could not be persuaded to lie out in the garden, which would have done her good, but insisted on shutting out the sunshine and air. William John came up to read to her, but she interrupted him again and again with talk about her health, and the poor boy spent a wretched afternoon. He is so kind, but has none of the charm of Charles. Neither Charles nor Janey came near their mother. I fear we are not a happy family. When I went to say good-night to Charles, he was pillow-fighting with Samuel and Robert, and hardly noticed me. An uncomfortable day. Daniel has ridden to Horsham to pay the Leighs a short visit.

August 11. A most vexing talk with Mrs. Clifford. She began by some flattery, I think insincere, and then wondered very much that I was not married. She said it was laughable for one of my age and appearance to devote so much time to my family. She threatened me with being left on the shelf. She then spoke most improperly of my father, whom she seems to dislike, and began some sly hints about Daniel. At

this I left her. She is not a good-hearted woman, and can think of nothing beyond men and marriage. I wonder why Daniel is visiting the Leighs. Catherine Leigh has certainly grown handsome.

August 12th. A dull day, with little to record. Caleb, William John, Charles and Robert went riding together, refusing to be troubled with any of the girls. Rose sulked all the morning. Janey came to me to complain about her clothes. They are certainly plain, but it is impossible to go against my father in this matter. My cousins dress simply enough, although they always wear pretty colours. But it is, of course, the far too elegant clothes of Rose that have fretted Janey. Mrs. Clifford dresses her child like a fashion plate. Janey was unreasonable and very pert. Daniel is still away. I am afraid I have allowed my thoughts about him to run on most wildly.

August 13th, Sunday. A long Meeting. Charles behaved ill, trying to make his younger cousins laugh. He succeeded all too well. I am sorry, for Cousin Richard is not lenient towards frivolity at Meeting. On our return, to make matters worse, Mrs. Clifford started to poke fun at Quaker customs. Cousin Richard silenced her most sternly. She is a disagreeable woman. My step-mother kept her room again, and has been very fretful. A great number of Friends came in in the afternoon, and Mrs. Clifford, who is quite irrepressible, tried to shock them with her airs and graces. The whole company ignored her. When I spoke to Charles about his behaviour at Meeting, he was at first defiant. He told me he did not believe in God. I hardly knew what to say to him. I do not know whether I believe in God myself. After we had talked a little, Charles became most sweet and made me laugh as he always does. I love my brother so much that I do not think it necessary to love any one else. Except, of course, my father. At the end I told Charles that good behaviour at Meeting was not a question of belief in God but of good manners. This seemed to impress him. Poor little Charles! God, as Papa sees him, is not kindly. Caroline told me that Catherine Leigh was once

engaged to be married, but that it had been broken off. She is very handsome. I wonder if Daniel will return to-morrow.

Daniel did return. In the clear light of the late afternoon he rode up to the front door of Longdale on his grey horse. He had a few private words with his father before dinner, and when the family assembled in the dining-room, Caroline's lovely face was radiant. Daniel's business at Horsham had, it seemed, been less with Catherine than with her brother, James Leigh, who was to come to Longdale the following day, and, although nobody in so many words said why, Caroline's eyes clearly betrayed the secret.

Dinner was a merry meal over which they sat longer than usual. And when at last the children had rushed out helter skelter for a game in the orchard, Daniel came up to Margaret.

"Shall we walk in the garden?" he asked her. Margaret nodded and they went out together.

They went through the green gate into the flower garden and paced up and down the long paths between herbaceous borders. It was a still, lovely evening, fading by then into twilight; the air was heavy with the sweetness of stocks. The cousins walked for some time in silence. Daniel, his shy, rather slow nature fired by young James Leigh's talk of love and marriage, had, on the road home, composed a dozen flowery speeches to Margaret which it now seemed impossible to make. Floweriness sat uneasily on him. He had always, in a fashion, loved his cousin, but this summer, after a year's absence, his feeling for her had grown more profound. He sought laboriously for words in which to say so.

Margaret's dress was white, and as they left the house Daniel had thrown over her shoulders a blood-red shawl. He thought her very beautiful.

"Margaret," he said at last.

"Yes, Daniel." But, as Daniel seemed powerless to proceed, it was Margaret who helped him. "I have missed thee," she said softly.

"Is that true?"

"Yes, indeed, Daniel. I have missed thee every day."

"And I thee. Oh, Margaret, I love thee."

"I know."

Margaret's answer took Daniel by surprise, herself as well. They stopped walking, and she turned to look at him. A slight hardness in her face, put there by too many cares and responsibilities, was gone. She seemed very young, yet unafraid and perfectly self-assured. Daniel's timidity vanished. "Will thee marry me, Margaret?" he asked, taking her hand.

"Yes, Daniel." Margaret spoke without thinking, because just then she did not want to think. Her active, conscientious mind could have produced too many reasons for hesitation. There was Charles, who had only herself to love him; there was her father, in much the same case as Charles; her step-mother, who relied on her; John William and Janey; the whole Bryanston Square household, in fact, with its long-sustained habit of resting on her shoulders. But she meant to think of none of these things now. This was her moment, more than ever precious to Margaret, who had missed so much of youth. With a gesture that was trusting rather than provocative, she laid her disengaged hand against Daniel's breast. "I love thee, Daniel," she told him. And he kissed her.

JANEY'S DIARY

August 14th. I feel sure that Daniel was flirting last night with Margaret. We saw them go into the flower-garden together and I wanted to peep through the gate, but Priscilla Mary said it was wrong to spy. She is such a *good* girl! This morning Margaret looked all moony, and so did Daniel. I wonder if they mean to be married. Cousin Caroline is to marry James Leigh. He is handsome, I think, and it must be a fine thing to be married. He is also rich. Rose Clifford says that she will be married before me. This is not likely, because

I am older than she is, but she is very vain and proud. Mamma made me hold her wool all the morning. It was very tiresome. Nobody considers my feelings.

August 15th. There is no use writing in my diary because I have nothing to say. A parcel of new dresses came by the carrier from London for Rose Clifford. It is unfair that she should have so many, it is disgusting the way she runs after Charles. I do not think him so handsome, he is only a little boy. I asked Margaret again for some new clothes. She says father would never allow me to dress like Rose, but she was not cross this time. She has not been cross since she went into the flower-garden with Daniel. This evening she walked for a long time on the lawn with Cousin Ellesmere and Cousin Priscilla. I could not get near enough to hear what they were saying.

August 18th. I am quite sure that Margaret and Daniel are engaged, but they do not say anything. I suppose they are waiting until Papa is here. He is to come back on Monday. I do wish he would stay away longer, for he spoils our fun. I think I should be glad if Margaret did marry Daniel. She is always finding fault with me, and a wedding would be enjoyable. I went into Mrs. Clifford's bedroom while she was in the garden and looked at her dresses and Rose's. It is cruel that they should have so many. I suppose it is because they are not Quakers. I wish we were not, I cannot see any good in it.

August 20th, Sunday. A disagreeable day, of course. Meeting was longer than ever, and when I tried to joke with Charles he would not look at me. The pins and needles in my feet were worse than ever. I cannot see any good in Sunday. Margaret and Daniel are still moony, so I told Charles I was sure that they want to be married. He called me a liar and many other shocking names. William John told me that I should mind my own business. My brothers are not kind. I do not see why Rose Clifford should be so much luckier than I am. She has all those dresses and no brothers.

August 22nd. Papa returned yesterday and everything is in confusion.

CHAPTER FOUR

Confusion

JOHN BARON'S return certainly brought an unexpected check to the contentment of Longdale, where Margaret had willingly been accepted as a daughter-in-law by Richard and Priscilla Ellesmere. Since she and Daniel were not first cousins, there was nothing in their projected marriage to offend against Quaker rulings; nothing, in fact, for John Baron to object to, short of a natural distress of losing his daughter. He had always liked Daniel, whom he respected as a good man of business and the quietest and steadiest of the Ellesmere children.

Out of respect for her father, Margaret did not speak of her betrothal to any one beyond Daniel's parents; she preferred to wait until John's return rather than write to him on so important a matter; but she and Daniel spent so much time together, and their faces so completely betrayed them, that although, outwardly, the family attention centred on the now publicly announced engagement between Caroline and James Leigh, most people guessed what had happened.

On the morning of the day that brought John Baron, Margaret and Daniel were out very early in the garden; they went first to the dairy for milk, then walked slowly up and down the lawn, on grass still wet with dew. The breathless, almost grey morning gave promise of an excessively hot day and possibly of thunder.

"Daniel," Margaret began a little timidly, after they had been walking for some time; and her grip on his arm tightened.

"What, love?"

"I must speak to thee, Daniel. It is about something that

I should have spoken of before. I have been wanting to every day."

"And why not, my precious? Am I so alarming?"

"No, Daniel. No, my dear, of course not. But we have been so happy that I——"

"*Have* been so happy? What does thee mean, Margaret? We are still happy, aren't we? We are going to be even happier. What is on thy mind?"

Margaret sighed. For Daniel, everything was so simple. For her, nothing was. Ever since that sweet, unthinking moment in the flower-garden when he had asked her to be his wife, Margaret's happiness had been clouded with worry. She knew her father so well. He would not, of course, refuse to allow the marriage; he had no justification whatever for such a refusal. But he would make it hard for her; would make her feel to the fullest extent that she was deserting her home and evading her responsibilities. This attitude Margaret was prepared to face; for all her loyalty to her father and her strongly developed sense of duty towards his second wife and family, she had no inclination to make a sacrifice of her own life. But to leave Charles was different. Without clearly reading the dark places of John's heart, Margaret knew they existed; she could neither ignore the fact that Charles and his father were an ill-matched pair, nor believe that in her absence the boy might not be still more harshly treated.

Daniel, a little impatiently, repeated his question. "What is on thy mind, Margaret? Please trust me."

"It's about Charles," she told him. "I know it seems a great deal to ask of thee, Daniel, when we are just starting our own home together. But I want—I would like Charles to live with us."

"Why not? I will gladly have him if thy father makes no objection. Why did thee find it so difficult to ask me, dearest? Thee should know by now how much I want to please thee." Daniel, indeed, saw nothing particularly troublesome in Margaret's request: accustomed to a crowd of brothers and

sisters around him, he did not anticipate any inconvenience from the presence in his new home of one small boy.

"Of course," he went on soothingly, "thee would not wish to be separated from Charles. And as far as I'm concerned, thee shall not be. I like Charles. He will keep us very merry."

"Oh, Daniel, thee are too good to me!" Margaret's eyes shone. She felt suddenly peaceful and reassured. Daniel had made everything seem so easy.

"And now, love," he went on, "to return to this question of furnishing. It will not seem too tiresome living at first in my uncle's house?"

"Tiresome? With thee? Oh, Daniel!" Margaret, thinking wearily of the large and arduous establishment in Bryanston Square, could barely credit the peaceful prospect of occupying with Daniel one floor of his uncle Samuel Ellesmere's house in Bishopsgate Street in the City. She knew Samuel well, a quiet and kindly bachelor, who had for some years now kept a set of handsome rooms vacant, against his nephew bringing a wife there. To live with simple comfort in these, spending all holidays at Longdale, would be perfection. And now Charles was provided for. Margaret felt completely happy.

"We shall arrange the rooms ourselves," said Daniel, "and my uncle has already promised me the price of the furniture. He has teased me for years to bring home a wife. And he will certainly welcome Charles. Thee knows how he loves children." And the talk then turned almost exclusively on beds, hangings, wardrobes and sofas.

Charles, also, had risen early. He had woken to a heavy feeling of heat and to the recollection of a disturbing conversation the night before with Janey, who had twitted him with his ignorance of Margaret's love affair, hinting spitefully that if his step-sister were to marry and leave home, he would feel a considerable and unpleasant difference.

Like most children, Charles had, when happy, small desire for adult society; his days at Longdale were so filled with fun and adventure that he scarcely thought about Margaret

at all. He had certainly noticed nothing unusual between his step-sister and his cousin Daniel. Janey's words had not kept him awake, but now, lying in bed with nothing to distract him, he brooded on them. Janey had told him a falsehood. She must have done. It was not possible that Margaret should go away and leave him. Yet people, even relatives, did marry; there was his cousin Susannah and now Caroline as well. So why not Margaret, whom he thought handsomer than either of them? Charles, troubled and restless, rose and dressed himself, and, not caring for once to raid the larder, he went to the orchard, where, stretched on his back upon the still wet grass, he stared up through the branches of an apple tree, trying to imagine what home would be like without his step-sister. The more he thought about this the more forlorn he felt. A queer sick sensation came over him, attacking the pit of his stomach; for it was Margaret, not Sophia, whom he regarded as his mother.

He did not, a little later, observe the approach of Rose Clifford, who came running into the orchard and plumped herself down on the grass beside him.

"Thee made me jump," he told her resentfully.

"Thee!" mimicked Rose. She had hoped for a warmer welcome.

"Yes, thee. Why not? Thee, thee, *thee*!"

"It's such a silly way of talking."

"No, it is not," snapped Charles, who privately agreed with her.

"Mamma says——"

"Who cares for thy mamma? Go away, please."

"But I want to stay with you." Rose was sitting back on her heels, trying to keep the flounces of her muslin dress from the damp grass.

"Then I shall go away." Charles rose abruptly, pushing against Rose, who overbalanced.

"Oh, my dress!" she wailed. "Why are you so unkind, Charles?"

"I'm not," answered the boy a little wearily, "but I don't want thee now. I'm thinking." He walked away.

Rose, scrambling up, ran after him. "I won't talk," she promised, "and I didn't mean to laugh at you for saying 'thee.' You can't help being a Quaker."

"Oh, can't I?" Charles retorted, stung by this. "Well, I'll show thee that I can. The very first thing I'll do when I can do what I like is to stop being a Quaker."

"Oh, Charles! How delightful! Then you and I can be married."

"Of all the silly notions!" He stopped to stare at her with disgust. "Who wants to be married?"

"Why, every one, of course. That's what people are made for."

"No, it isn't."

"It is then. Your papa and mamma are married, aren't they? And Uncle and Aunt Ellesmere. And so is cousin Susannah, and cousin Caroline is going to be, and so is your sister Margaret."

"Who says she is?" Charles demanded angrily.

"Mamma does. She says a blind man can see what's between Margaret and Daniel. She says they are only waiting until your papa comes back to ask his consent. And she says——"

"Stop it! I don't want to hear what thy mamma says. Peg would never be married without telling me. She wouldn't, I say. She *wouldn't*!"

Rose, about to continue the argument, saw that Charles's lips were trembling, and this sign of weakness in a boy, who fascinated her by his bravado and by his lordly attitude towards herself, astonished the little girl. It also moved her, and she caught hold of his arm, saying softly, "Oh, Charles, don't be unhappy. I love you."

"I don't care for that. Why should I?"

"I only said so to comfort you. And I dare say Mamma is mistaken. But even if Margaret does marry Daniel, why will you mind so?"

"Stop it!" Charles said again; wrenching his arm away from her, he started to run. But the heat of the morning, the fact that he had eaten nothing and the awful foreboding that Rose had spoken the truth, suddenly overcame him. Only a few yards away from her he flung himself on the grass in a veritable passion of weeping.

Rose was transfixed. Never before had she seen Charles shed a tear. Now he was sobbing uncontrollably. She approached cautiously and, after a moment's hesitation, sat down as close beside him as she dared; having a feminine fondness for providing consolation, she did not wish to leave him, yet was half-afraid of his anger at finding her still there. She remained, however, and gradually Charles's sobs grew less violent until he sat up at last, beginning to rub the tears away from his cheeks. He saw Rose then and scowled at her.

A little frightened, she held on to her courage. "Shall we go and eat some plums?" she ventured as casually as possible.

At the undoubted good sense of this suggestion the scowl relaxed. Rose jumped to her feet. "I'll race you to the big plum tree," she challenged and began to run.

"Thee will *not*!" Charles's voice was husky but he tore after her. He reached the plum tree an easy first.

Dinner was over by the time John Baron reached Longdale. The ladies were alone in the drawing-room, Richard Ellesmere having gone with Daniel to the village to inquire into a case of sickness. Margaret welcomed her father at the front door; but the younger children were nowhere to be seen and John, too tired and hungry to inquire for them, ate a light meal in the dining-room, where Priscilla sat with him, hoping as she glanced covertly at his stiff, unhappy face, that he would put no difficulties in Margaret's way. And yet, she thought, how can he? She has always been a sweet daughter to him, and he must surely see that her happiness lies with Daniel.

After John had eaten they went into the drawing-room. The room was quietly pleasant; its long windows stood open,

letting in the scent of flowers and grass. Margaret was trying to distract her step-mother's attention from a headache while Caroline talked in a corner with James Leigh. Mrs. Clifford, dull and discontented, fiddled with some fancy work.

John Baron sat down beside his wife's sofa. "And how art thou, my dear?" he asked her distantly.

"Very poorly. This heat tries me so. I have a headache and I am sure it is going to thunder."

"I should not be surprised," replied her husband; he had nothing further to say to Sophia, and she, though longing to enlarge upon the state of her health, refrained, from fear of provoking him.

Caroline, followed by James, went over to the piano, where they proposed to sing a duet, but Priscilla shook her head at them; as she knew that Daniel intended to approach Margaret's father later in the evening, there seemed no purpose in annoying him by the "sinful" frivolity of music beforehand.

Caroline made a face. "Shall we go up to the schoolroom and watch the theatricals?" she asked her lover.

"By all means," replied James, who would rather have gone alone with her into the garden, but stood too much in awe of John Baron to suggest this.

"Theatricals?" John inquired sharply. "Is that why none of my children were here to greet me except Margaret?"

"They cannot have heard the carriage, Papa."

"Of course they did not hear it," said Priscilla. "Thee can have no idea, Cousin John, how much noise our kind of theatricals make. I don't know what the play is, but my closet has been ransacked for finery!" She spoke pleasantly, but with a certain decision, as if daring John to criticise her children's pleasures. Since he took the hint, the matter might have dropped there, had not Mrs. Clifford, oppressed by the quietness of the drawing-room, exclaimed eagerly, "Pray let us go up and watch them. Children's theatricals are always so diverting."

"I think they are happier by themselves, Mary," Priscilla

said. "And they will not get into mischief. Amelia and Caleb will see to that."

But, with a great jangle of bracelets, Mrs. Clifford had risen already. "I am coming with you," she told Caroline.

John Baron also rose. "And so am I. It is more than two weeks since I have seen the children."

Priscilla, who did not think that his visit would add to the gaiety of the schoolroom, went too, and Margaret would have followed had her step-mother not inquired peevishly, "And am I to be left here all alone?"

"There does not seem to be much noise," John remarked dourly as they climbed the staircase leading to the schoolroom. He was the first of the party to reach the door and, opening it, he went in.

Janey, William John and the younger Ellesmeres, all strangely attired, were grouped in a circle round the schoolroom table, on which, draped in a sheet, stood Charles. His hair was wild, his eyes were bright with excitement, and to a deeply attentive audience he was declaiming Mark Antony's funeral oration.

As the door opened, his voice, young yet impressive, rang out clearly—"The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." In the front of the group, her hands clasped tightly together, her eyes fixed wonderingly on Charles, stood Rose Clifford.

"Charles!" thundered John Baron.

The oration abruptly ceased. The audience turned with startled looks towards the door. Charles remained on the table.

"Get down and come here to me," ordered his father.

Caleb Ellesmere held out a kindly hand to help Charles down. Little Martha, alarmed by John's angry voice, clung to Priscilla Mary. William John looked distressed; Janey, expectant. And Charles walked over to his father.

"How often have I forbidden this play-acting?" John asked sternly.

"Charles was only reciting," protested Amelia. "We asked him to do it."

"That is enough, my dear. Charles knows that such reciting—and in costume too—is forbidden. It is altogether too theatrical. Thou wilt take off those ridiculous garments, Charles, and come with me."

"It was not his fault," put in Caleb hotly. The young Ellesmeres had no fear of older people.

"Come with me, Charles," repeated John Baron. But Priscilla barred his way.

"If thee has the intention of whipping the boy, Cousin John," she said quietly, "thee must take him from under my roof. He has done no harm."

"That is a matter of opinion. Dost thou not know, Priscilla, where this play-acting leads to?"

"Nonsense! The child was speaking Shakespeare. Where can that lead to?" Priscilla put her hand on Charles's shoulder. She was a plump woman, not very tall, but she could assume great dignity when she chose to.

"I did not say there was any harm in Shakespeare," retorted John, "although Charles neglects his other studies to read him. But I will not tolerate this affected declaiming. Charles knows that very well. He has disobeyed me. And when he disobeys he must be punished."

"Then thee can send him to bed," replied Priscilla calmly. "But thee will not strike thy children in this house. There are things that Richard and I will not tolerate either. Thee was not always so hard, Cousin John."

The shot went home. John, as Priscilla intended, thought of his first Margaret, with her laughter, her tolerance of all things except harshness, deceit and cruelty, and while not liking Priscilla the better for her reminder, he knew that he must be influenced by it.

"Very well," he said gruffly. "I will not offend thee, cousin. Go to bed, Charles. Go to bed instantly." And he turned his back on the hostile young faces in the schoolroom.

Stumbling a little over his Roman draperies, Charles pushed through the group round the door; his sullen face showed no gratitude for Priscilla's intercession. It was better to be beaten than sent to bed like a baby.

"Poor little fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Clifford with shrill indignation. Charles glared at her and Rose burst into tears.

After this unhappy scene, Priscilla's first thought was to prevent Daniel from speaking to John Baron until the following morning; but John took his discomfiture into the garden, where Daniel, returning from the village, found him. Their interview was not a long one and, when the family were assembled later at tea, Daniel came in to ask Margaret if she would go to her father in a little room known as the Rose Parlour.

"Take him some tea, my dear," suggested Richard Ellesmere.

Priscilla arranged on a tray two of her delicate porcelain cups with some small cakes, and Daniel, opening the door for Margaret, followed her out into the hall.

"Thy father has been most kind," he said, dropping a light kiss on the back of her neck. "He has made no difficulties at all and only moaned a little about losing thee."

"Oh, Daniel! Can our wedding be soon?" Margaret felt at that moment an intense love for him, a most intense longing to be near him always.

"The sooner the better, my darling. There seems nothing to delay us." And Daniel added a little breathlessly, "I wish it could be to-morrow!"

"But I shall need new clothes. Don't keep me, Daniel, or my father's tea will be cold. And that might turn him against us!" Laughing, Margaret went down the hall to the Rose Parlour.

John stood by the open window with his back to the door; he seemed to stoop a little, to look almost old, and Margaret, setting down the tray, went to him swiftly and slipped her arm through his. He started and looked down at her face, seeing there a soft, eager expression that reminded him of

her younger days and of her mother. "So thou wishest to leave me, Margaret," he said.

She pressed his arm. "Thee must not think of it like that, Papa. I shall see thee so often. Daniel and I are to live in London and we shall all be together in the summer, here."

"Thou takest my consent for granted, then?" John asked her dryly.

"What reason could thee have for refusing it?" Margaret put the question with spirit.

Her father sighed. How easily he offended people! Priscilla's indignation at what still seemed to him a reasonable attempt to discipline Charles had hurt; her veiled reference to Margaret's mother had revived too many bitter-sweet memories. In the garden he had felt very lonely, overcome by a desire to be loved as his first wife had loved him, as Margaret had once loved him herself. He saw, though dimly, that his repressive attitude, his too rigid religion and his distrust of joy had changed his daughter; that her regard for him was becoming gradually a thing of duty rather than pleasure. And so, when Daniel approached him, John had been glad of the chance to make amends by giving a quick and unqualified consent to Margaret's marriage. That she should seem so little grateful, so quick to assert her rights, disappointed him; but he was still anxious not to antagonise her.

"No reason at all," he replied to her question, "but thou must make some allowance for my feelings. Thou shouldst not forget thy father in thine own happiness."

"As if I would!" Margaret was quickly contrite. "I have thought of thee all the time. But I have been so very anxious to know what thee would say. I love Daniel."

"Of course, child. It is natural that thou shouldst. And I approve of thy choice. Daniel spoke to me very openly and will make thee a good husband, I am sure. But thou must not forget how empty thy place at home will be."

"I shall come there often, Papa. And you will all come to visit me. Thee must not be unhappy."

"No," said John drearily, "I must not be unhappy."

"Did thee expect me never to marry? Did thee think me so unpleasing?" Margaret's weak attempt at playfulness fell flat.

"No, no. I expected it, of course. Thou art very charming. But I cannot pretend to be glad."

"Papa, I love thee. I shall always love thee."

"But thy husband will come first. That is as it should be." With a real effort to conquer his self-pity, John patted her hand. "Do not distress thyself, my darling. I am not so selfish as thou thinkest. We shall all be contented enough, no doubt."

"Indeed we shall. More than contented! Now take thy tea, Papa." Margaret, handing him his cup, went on confidently. "There is one other thing."

"Eh? What is that? Money, I suppose, for wedding finery. Thou needst not worry, child. But I wish I could persuade thee to adopt the Friends' dress. That would give me such great pleasure."

"I will ask Daniel," Margaret replied demurely, knowing well enough that her lover would derive no pleasure at all from seeing her dressed as a Quakeress. "But it was not clothes or money that I wanted to ask thee about."

"Well, then, what is it?" John's voice hardened a little. Margaret's innocent reminder that Daniel would soon become her highest authority had disconcerted him.

"It is about Charles, Papa," said Margaret.

"Charles? And what has he to do with all this?" Even at such a moment was the boy still uppermost in his sister's mind? John frowned, but Margaret, not observing the danger signal, went on, "I wondered, Papa, if he might—if thee would allow him to come to us when we are married."

"Come to you? I am afraid I do not understand thee."

"I mean to live with us. I have asked Daniel and he is most willing"

"Ah, thou hast asked Daniel? But thou hast waited until

now to ask me. I am Charles's father, remember. Why should the boy leave my house and go to thine?"

"Thee finds him troublesome, thee knows that, Papa."

"I do. He is a disobedient and undisciplined child. And I think, Margaret, that thou art partly to blame for it. The boy may do better without thee. It is to be hoped so."

"Papa! Charles has never been separated from me before! He will be so unhappy. He will miss me so——"

"*He will miss thee!*" interrupted John Baron in a burst of rage. "*He will be unhappy!* And what of me? What of my unhappiness? Thou takest that lightly enough. Thou wishest to be married, and therefore I can do without my daughter. But Charles, a child who can have no serious feelings, who is not even thy real brother—*he* must not be parted from thee. *He* must be taken with thee to thy husband's house. To be mollycoddled and petted even further, I suppose. I would not have believed thee capable of such folly!"

"But, Papa——"

"Be silent! There is nothing more to be said! Thy proposal is ridiculous. And let me tell thee this—thy doting on that boy almost amounts to a sin. And I am sorry that Daniel should encourage thee."

"Daniel understands how much I care for Charles."

"Then Daniel is a fool. And if I agreed, which I shall not, he would soon grow tired of playing second fiddle to a troublesome boy. But I will spare him that humiliation."

"Then you refuse?"

"I do. Charles will remain where he is, in his father's house, and thou wilt oblige me by never mentioning the matter again."

"Papa, please listen——" Margaret spoke desperately, but John, shaking with anger and jealousy, cut her short.

"I refuse absolutely," he shouted, striking his hand on the table with a force that knocked off his teacup. The fragile china smashed at his feet.

"Very well, Papa," Margaret's voice sounded far away and

cold. She bent down to gather up the broken pieces, and after laying them upon the tea-tray, looked John straight in the face. "I understand thee perfectly," she told him and left the room.

Restlessly, Daniel waited for Margaret in the drawing-room. But she did not come. He went once to the Rose Parlour, only to find the door open and the room in darkness. Perhaps Margaret and her father were continuing their conversation in the garden? Daniel was not apprehensive—John Baron's consent to the marriage had been too unqualified to permit this—but he did wish Margaret would come to him. The evening was very close and there were distant rumbles of thunder. His nerves began to play him tricks. He felt a great need for Margaret, but she did not come. She did not come because, after pacing her room for some time, she had taken a candle and gone to Charles.

He was awake, and, lying on his back, with the covers thrown off, stared up at her stormily.

"Well, Charles." Margaret put the candle on a little table and sat down on the bed.

"Papa had no right to send me to bed," the boy burst out, "and to treat me like that in front of all the others. I'm not a baby. And what harm was I doing? Cousin Priscilla saw no harm in it. I hate him!"

"Oh, Charles!"

"Yes, I do. I hate him. I hate all Quakers. I'm going to stop being a Quaker. It makes a fool of one. Thee knows it does."

"Charles, don't be so violent. Thee must conform to Quaker ways now. Later on, thee can choose for thyself."

"I have chosen. I hate our silly way of talking. It makes people laugh."

"Only foolish people. What does it matter how one talks? And why must thee always make Papa so angry?"

"Because he has no sense. He sees harm in everything.

Especially in anything pleasant. I hate him. When we leave here I shall not go back to Bryanston Square at all."

"Charles! What does thee mean?"

"I mean I shall run away, of course."

"And what would become of me if thee did that?"

"Thee would not care. Thee will be married to Daniel."

"Who told thee that?" asked Margaret sharply.

"Janey did. And Rose too. But I don't care. Thee can marry Daniel as much as thee chooses." Charles's hot hand, which clutched suddenly at Margaret's, belied the rudeness of his words.

"Well, if thee does not care, Charles, there is no more to be said."

"Of course I don't care," Charles repeated. But, as his step-sister rose from the bed, he pulled her back, flung his arms around her and held on tight.

Margaret rocked him gently to and fro, with tears upon her cheeks; the pressure of the child's light body moved her so profoundly that it was some little time before she disengaged herself and laid Charles back on his pillow. "Thee need not fret," she told him quietly, "I shall not marry Daniel."

Charles smiled. "That's good," he remarked with the placid egotism of childhood. "I knew those girls were wrong."

"Good-night," Margaret said abruptly. As she reached the door Charles called after her, "Peg, are thee sure?"

"Sure of what, Charles?"

"About not marrying Daniel?"

"Quite sure, my dear," replied Margaret, and she went slowly downstairs to find her lover.

CHAPTER FIVE

End of a Girlhood

UPLIFTED and a little blinded by the force of an impulsive self-sacrifice, Margaret actually expected Daniel to rise to equal heights, and it was this belief that supported her when she went in search of him to the drawing-room. The night had become so threatening that no one cared to venture out of doors, and Priscilla, seeing that her son and Margaret had an urgent need to talk together, suggested a return to the Rose Parlour. She herself retired soon afterwards, and in her own room, oppressed with a faint sense of foreboding, she prayed most earnestly for the happiness of her son.

Daniel had waited impatiently but not in expectation of any but good news; he was amazed, therefore, when Margaret, after pouring out to him all that had happened, finished brokenly, "So thee must see, Daniel, that I cannot marry thee."

Daniel laughed. He could not even comprehend how so much emotion could surround the parting from a young step-brother, whom Margaret would, after all, be able to visit at will; her point of view struck him as sentimental, almost shockingly so; and, being too much in love to admit her faults easily, he attempted to dismiss the whole matter as an absurdity. His laughter, though indulgent, was an error.

"I am glad to have amused thee," exclaimed Margaret bitterly, "but I can see nothing to laugh at."

"Dearest, I was not laughing at thee. But this is preposterous. Thee cannot seriously suggest breaking our engagement on account of Charles."

"I *am* breaking our engagement on account of Charles."

Daniel had hardly digested this statement before Margaret

rushed on. "How can thee expect me to abandon the poor child? Thee knows how harshly my father treats him. Thee knows his mother never gives him a thought. How can thee ask me to do him such a wrong?"

"And what of the wrong thee would be doing me? That is, if thee continues with this foolishness."

"Can thee find no better name to call my love for my brother?"

"Margaret," Daniel said patiently, "Charles is only thy step-brother. He is not alone. He has William John and Janey, and I do not think that Cousin John and his wife are such bad parents really. Cousin John is strict, I know, but——"

"He is more than strict. He is unkind. Thy mother knows that, Daniel."

Daniel was uncertain what to say next; he knew that Priscilla did indeed disapprove of John Baron's severity, but he still could not attach the same importance to the problem that Margaret did.

"Does thee think," she continued, "that it is easy for me to give up my life with thee? Does thee not know how often lately I have wanted to leave my father's house?"

"If thee really loves me, Margaret, there is no need to give up anything."

They were both silent. Daniel waited for an avowal that did not come. Margaret's confused and already shaken belief that he would applaud her sacrifice and admire her the more for it, was something of which he had not even thought. He was hurt that she should consider any one more important to her than himself; the only emotions he understood were simple ones. It was impossible for him to estimate the maternal quality of Margaret's feeling for Charles, or for her to explain it to him. She did not clearly estimate it herself. As a child she had existed with the sole purpose of loving her father; then, with the coming of Charles and the change in John Baron's demeanour, the little boy had taken his place. Could she have escaped from the situation, she might have viewed

it in proportion; but, as things were, it actually dwarfed her affection for Daniel, her desire for a home of her own.

Daniel said at last, "Cannot thee see, Margaret, that this excessive affection for Charles is almost morbid."

"Morbid! When I have cared for him from a baby? When I have been everything to him?"

"But, my darling, that is what thee should be to thine own children. And to me. Thee has had too much responsibility, too little pleasure. Thy mind is so full of duty that thee cannot see clearly."

"I see too clearly. I am beginning to see that thee and my father are alike. Both jealous of poor Charles."

"Jealous of a child? Thee must be mad! Although I am a little jealous certainly of everything that holds thee. I want to break all these ties. To teach thee to be gay."

"Well," flashed Margaret, "there is one tie thee will not break. I shall continue to love my brother."

"Love him as much as thee likes. But thee must not wreck thy life and mine. Charles will soon grow up. And I think thee exaggerates his troubles." Daniel, in spite of his own lenient upbringing, could not think that strict rules and a few whippings did any boy serious harm. And Charles was something of a handful. Rashly, he added, "Thee must allow thy father to know best. Charles may be the better man for such treatment."

"I did not think thee so hard," said Margaret coldly. "But perhaps it is as well to find it out in time."

"I am not hard. But I am tired of this foolish fuss."

"Then we will not discuss it."

Daniel did not want to; he wanted to put his arms round Margaret and kiss her. And although his actions would have been decorous, his thoughts went further; he was impatient to possess her, to have her beside him always, to be intimate and gay. He had no time to waste on trivialities like Charles.

He tried to take her hand, but Margaret moved away. "No, Daniel," she said sharply, "do not caress me now."

"No? Then thee had better go to bed, my darling." He fought for patience. "Thee looks sadly tired. This trouble with Cousin John has worn thee out. It will seem much less important in the morning."

"No, it will not. My mind is made up. I am only sorry thee cannot see where my duty lies."

"I do. It lies with me." Daniel spoke with some arrogance.

"I have no duty to thee yet," Margaret retorted.

"But thee loves me, surely?" He saw that he had been tactless, and now spoke pleadingly. "Thee wants to marry me? To live with me always? Oh, Margaret, we have made such fine plans! Thee cannot have changed thy mind already!"

"Daniel, if thee would only try to understand!"

"What is there to understand about a mistaken devotion?"

"It is not mistaken."

"Perhaps not, dearest. But it is exaggerated. Does thee think Charles will thank thee for thy sacrifice? Does thee think, that when he grows up and has plans and desires of his own, he will remember it?"

"I am talking of my duty, not his."

"Then thee will succeed, by this talk of duty, in spoiling both thy life and mine. And I do not think thee would do good even by staying with Charles. He might be better without thee."

"And why?" Margaret asked dangerously, "does thee think that?"

"Boys should be left to men. They should not be pampered."

Daniel, in echoing John Baron, could hardly have done worse. Margaret had been standing close to him. Now she made a movement to leave the room, saying in a voice shaking with nerves and anger, "I thank thee, Daniel. I am glad to know thy opinion. I am just a fool, then, who pampers my brother? I have given him a mother's love, and this is all thee can find to say to me!"

Daniel checked her. "No, dearest, no. I did not mean to

be unkind. I respect everything thee has done for the little boy. But he cannot have thy protection always. He must learn to stand on his own feet."

"Perhaps. But he is still too young to do without me. And I will not leave him."

"But—I love thee."

"No, Daniel, thee does not. Not even enough to sympathise or understand. There is no more to be said."

Daniel got between Margaret and the door. He stood over her, a big, solid young man, and for a moment she longed to lean her head against him; to sob out all her perplexities; to be petted like a child. She longed now for the embrace which she had repudiated before. She longed for Daniel to agree with her that it would be wicked and impossible to leave Charles; to concur in her devotion and yet by some mysterious means to solve the problem. She made a slight, timid movement of her hand towards her lover, but Daniel did not see it. Choosing to be sensible rather than loving, he merely said, "Thee are right, my dear. And we had better talk no more of this to-night. Thee must go straight to bed, love. And in the morning we will laugh at such nonsense."

Margaret dropped her hand. "Let me pass, Daniel," she told him proudly, "let me pass. And as to laughing, thee must do that alone. I shall never speak to thee of this matter again."

He stood aside, and before he could think of anything further to say, Margaret had left him.

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A heavy storm disturbed the night, and Daniel, after sleeping fitfully, awoke with all the sensations of one who has had a nightmare. He left his bed hurriedly to look at the morning, the refreshed beauty of which consoled him. Last night *had* been a nightmare. Daniel began to dress, thinking he would go into the garden and call Margaret to walk with him; she, too, must know by now that their quarrel lacked reality, that by talking calmly they would soon understand

each other; that they would, laughing at themselves in the fresh air, love the more truly.

As the clocks were striking six, Daniel stood under Margaret's window, holding a great blush rose that he had chosen for her. He threw up a handful of gravel.

Margaret pushed open the window. After a sleepless and wretched night she was already dressed; she looked pale and her eyes were heavy.

Daniel tossed up the rose. "Good-morning, dearest," he called cheerfully. "There is a love-gift. Come down and walk with me."

Margaret, catching the flower, smiled faintly. She was so tired, so sadly in need of comfort and support, that Daniel's hearty voice grated a little. And, if he must give the rose a name, why not an olive branch? But she did smile and Daniel at once took heart. "Look at the morning," he told her. "Come down, my stubborn darling, and let me scold thee."

Margaret's smile died away. So he meant to treat her as the aggressor! He meant to make no apology for his levity, his unkindness, his gross lack of comprehension. This was not to be borne, particularly so early in the morning. Daniel, looking up, saw a face so set and unresponsive as to be momentarily unlovable, and suffered a revulsion of feeling. "Margaret, please," he began, his voice a little irritable.

She cut him short. "I do not think it worth while to begin another disagreement. We are of such entirely different minds."

"But we can surely adjust them," said poor Daniel. His reconciliation, planned as a thing of roses, smiles and sunshine, was going completely awry. He had wanted to dismiss dissension with a kiss, not to argue with a woman who looked forbidding. As he hesitated, not knowing what to say next, Margaret, overcome by a sudden sick weariness of the whole situation, closed the window, and with Daniel's rose crushed in her hand, fell weeping on the bed. But Daniel never knew this.

Priscilla, going a little later to her son's room, found him packing; anxious to provoke no gossip among the servants, he was working off his anger by doing this service for himself. He glanced up at his mother, and then continued grimly to fold a coat.

"Why, Daniel!" exclaimed Priscilla. "What is the matter? Why are thee packing thy clothes?"

"I am going away for a while, Mother. I am going to our cousins at Brighton."

"But, my dear boy, why this sudden notion? Is something amiss?"

"No, Mother. At least—I—well, thee had better know perhaps that Margaret and I have parted."

"So soon? Oh, my dear Daniel! Why? Thee told me only last night that Cousin John was most agreeable."

"It is not Cousin John who has driven me away."

"Driven thee away? Daniel, pray tell me what has happened. Have thee and Margaret had some foolish quarrel?" Priscilla knew from the resentful, stubborn note in her son's voice that his self-esteem had been damaged.

"It is not a question of a quarrel," Daniel said shortly. "She does not love me. That is all."

"But I am sure that she does. I am sure thee are sadly mistaken. Go to Margaret, my dear, and put right whatever is wrong."

"I have already tried that," replied Daniel bitterly. "I have no wish to grovel."

"But thee knows," persisted Priscilla, "how easily thee are wounded. I cannot believe that Margaret would deliberately hurt thee."

"I think her most deliberate, Mother. But I would rather not discuss it just now. I will write to thee, perhaps. And I would like to be away before breakfast. Father will let Peter drive with my valises, I suppose. I shall ride the mare."

"Certainly, my dear boy. But I wish——" Priscilla checked herself, to say calmly, "Thee must take our love to Cousin

Jemina. Had I known of thy intention to visit her I would have packed some flowers and fruit." She had resolved not to argue with her son or force his confidence, but to leave him to himself instead. He would soon be back again, she thought, and the dispute would be soon mended. But Priscilla was wrong. Daniel wrote to his parents, telling them what had occurred, but he did not write to Margaret, and he stayed away from Longdale until after the Barons had left.

As is the custom in large families, the affair was quickly made known and discussed. Daniel's brothers and sisters, loving him greatly and believing he had been badly treated, cooled towards Margaret, while their father was frankly angry.

"It is my belief," Richard Ellesmere said to his wife, "that the girl has little heart."

Priscilla shook her head. "Thee are mistaken, dear. I would say rather that Margaret has too much. Thee should not forget how unnatural her life has been. As to Charles, he has been almost like her son. That instinct is very strong in Margaret, I feel sure, and Cousin John brought her on too quickly after her mother's death. For years now she has had too much care and responsibility."

"I am with thee in thinking that John is mostly to blame. But I still consider Margaret would have shown more character by breaking away and being a good wife to Daniel."

"Perhaps," said Priscilla quietly. "Yet I sometimes wonder now if their marriage would have been happy. There is a sensibility in Margaret that Daniel might never have understood. Not at least unless the whole of her affection centred on himself."

"To my mind," said Richard, who agreed decisively with Daniel, "her conduct has been morbid."

Priscilla wisely let the matter drop. She suffered equally for Daniel and for Margaret, and might, if permitted, have given the girl timely and tender advice. But Margaret would discuss her grief with no one; she seemed to wrap herself in a cold pride, repelling even the most gentle advances.

After writing in her diary, "I will never think of Daniel again," she proceeded naturally to think of very little else. Nor was there any lack of reminders, since even the children conversed freely about her lover's brusque departure.

Walking one morning in the shrubbery, Margaret recognised the voice of young Samuel Ellesmere coming from behind a clump of laurels.

"Thy sister," the boy was saying, "has jilted Daniel. Thee cannot expect us to love her as we used to."

"That isn't true," Margaret heard Charles reply. "Peg wouldn't jilt anybody. She wouldn't be so cruel. She never meant to marry Daniel. She told me so."

"Thee always pretends to know everything," chimed in Janey. "But thee are wrong this time. Of course Margaret meant to marry Daniel. She was in love with him."

"She wasn't!" said Charles.

"She was!" retorted Janey.

Rose spoke next. "Don't tease Charles so. It's not his fault. Perhaps it was Daniel who jilted Margaret."

"He wouldn't do that," declared Samuel.

"If he did," Charles said, "I'll fight him."

"Fight him!" squeaked Janey. "For shame, Charles! What would Papa say if he heard you?"

"And I'll fight Samuel too," was Charles's answer.

"You'd beat him easily." This was Rose.

"It's wrong to fight," said Samuel firmly.

Margaret hurried away.

When Sophia ventured to discuss the matter John Baron almost bit her head off.

"What hast thou to do with all this?" he asked angrily. "What business is it of thine?"

"I am sorry, John," whimpered Sophia, "but it is not unnatural for me, surely, to take an interest in Margaret. I was once a young girl myself, though thee seems to have forgotten it."

John, giving his wife a look that had bitterness in it and


no affection, had not forgotten. As a young girl she had caught him with her prettiness, and then had proceeded to saddle him with a troublesome family! How much better his life would have been had he remained faithful to his first wife's memory, content with the company of her daughter.

"There is no need for sentiment," he said sternly. "I would wish thee to hold thy tongue and not plague Margaret with such senseless chattering."

"I am sure I do not wish to plague her. But it is very hard that there should have been all this commotion. And no one thinks of me in the least! I suffer quite enough without having Margaret so pale-faced and dull. The very sight of her makes me feel ill."

"It takes very little to do that," John said curtly, ignoring the tears that welled up in his wife's eyes. And he left the room, filled with a fierce satisfaction that he was not, after all, to be deprived of the society of his favourite child.

Altogether, the conflicting emotions at Longdale on the subject of Margaret's dispute with Daniel made for such unpleasantness and discomfort, that only an innate courtesy concealed the Ellesmeres' relief when John Baron's family at last returned to London.



CHAPTER SIX

Oak Tree Cottage

THE unpacking once accomplished, life at Bryanston Square went on very much as before. It is possible that John may have found Margaret a little more withdrawn from him; that the servants found her more exacting, and Janey, even less affectionate; but to Charles, to William John and to Sophia she showed no change. She helped the boys with their lessons and sat for long hours endeavouring to distract her step-mother. She kept a sharp eye on domestic matters and presided as usual at her father's table, treating with her habitual courtesy the devout Friends who gathered there. She prayed with John and went to meeting. But her heart was not in her prayers.

Immediately on their return, the children resumed their studies. John Baron did not believe in schools, fearing that even those run on strictly religious lines failed to shut out evil communications; he therefore had a governess for Janey, sending his two sons for daily instruction to Robert Alfred Lowe, a Quaker tutor.

Friend Lowe, as he was called in the family, although the boys had another and most appropriate name for him, owned a small, staid house at Chelsea in the King's Road. He was a bachelor, living with his nephew, Edward Lowe, and tended by a very old housekeeper, who, half-blind and very lazy, kept the rooms in a dusty condition and saw to it that the light noonday meal paid for by the pupils' parents was of an almost penitential plainness.

Friend Lowe, a bulky man in the late fifties, possessed a great deal of knowledge without any real gift for imparting this to others. Kindly in a somewhat narrow way, he wanted his pupils to like him. The boys, however, although slightly

in awe of their tutor, found him repulsive, on account of his slovenly habits and his extreme frugality with soap and water. His nickname, "Old Onions" or "Friend Onions," referred crudely to the aroma of these, his favourite vegetable, which hung about him; his hands were always damp, and greyish in colour, and there was nothing Charles shrank from more than their touch on his shoulder while the tutor corrected an exercise. Only four boys besides the Barons attended this class, the nephew acting as an usher.

William John, being industrious, contrived by a stolid sort of application to learn a good deal, for when, as often happened, Friend Lowe did not explain himself clearly, William John referred to his book. But Charles was lazy. If a lesson seemed beyond his comprehension, he let it go, and John Baron, approving the progress of his elder son, blamed the younger for Friend Lowe's deficiencies as a teacher. Since all Charles's requests to be sent to a real school were ignored, and since his tutor's reports earned him countless punishments at home, he bore the establishment in Chelsea a not unnatural grudge, spending his time there most unprofitably and keeping a sharp look-out for distractions.

Next door to Friend Lowe's prim house stood Oak Tree Cottage, a ramshackle little place almost falling down under the weight of creepers and climbing roses; its garden, separated from the Quaker's by a low wall, was a wilderness—in spring and summer a most inviting one.

Quite often, during the somewhat solemn hour of recreation enjoyed by the pupils, a ball would find its way next door and, when this happened, Charles always volunteered to retrieve it. The tangled garden and the small empty cottage charmed him. He loved to peer through the dusty windows, to people the deserted rooms with company, to listen for imaginary voices and footsteps. He came, indeed, to regard Oak Tree Cottage as his own property and thought seriously of hoarding enough pocket-money for its purchase.

It was with considerable annoyance, therefore, in the

autumn, that Charles watched several cartloads of furniture being unloaded in front of his domain. It seemed that the friendly garden would soon become private property and his visits there likely to be regarded as a trespass. Charles was so angry that he resolved at once to plague the incoming tenants as thoroughly as he knew how. But when these tenants came he changed his mind.

Philip O'Brien, who had leased Oak Tree Cottage, was a violinist, whose practising and music lessons relieved the boredom of Friend Lowe's young gentlemen and infuriated their teacher. His wife, a big, black-haired woman, looked foreign and he had in addition a son and three handsome daughters.

It was not long before Charles knew all these people by sight. He made up the most absorbing stories about them, and his greatest wish, which just then was for a closer acquaintance with the O'Briens, was soon granted. It chanced to be Friend Onion's custom, whenever any of his pupils were refractory or inattentive, to have them locked by themselves in a small ground-floor room overlooking the garden. The window of this dungeon was so extremely small that not even Charles, who spent a great deal of time there, had thought seriously of escaping, until on a particular afternoon, after having kicked his heels for some time in solitary confinement, he decided to make the attempt. He pushed the little casement open, managed to get his head and shoulders through it, then, after a great deal of wriggling and squirming, the rest of himself followed. The final wriggle was such a violent one that he landed head first on the flower-bed below; hearing, as he picked himself up, the distinct sounds of a chuckle. And there, looking over the wall from next door, Charles saw a boy rather older than himself, with black, curly hair, whom he recognised as the young gentleman from Oak Tree Cottage.

"I never thought you'd do it," remarked the black-haired boy.

"It was easy," Charles said untruthfully.

"Why did you come out that way?"

"Locked in."

"The old Quaker?" the next-door boy inquired.

Charles nodded.

"I often feel sorry for you," continued the boy, who went himself to a rough and tumble sort of school where he managed, in spite of canes and masters, to have plenty of fun.

"Thee would feel sorrier if thee tried it," Charles told him gloomily, adding, "I've often seen thee before."

The boy was staring at him with great interest. "So you're a Quaker too?"

"Yes." Charles turned rather red. He waited for his new acquaintance to mock him as Rose Clifford had done. If this happened, he meant to go over the wall and fight, not for the honour of the Quakers, whom he detested, but because he could not endure being laughed at.

The black-haired boy did not laugh, merely remarking, as if in serious disappointment, "I suppose in that case you're pretty pious."

"I'm *not*!" Charles was both grateful for the seriousness and anxious to deny the accusation.

"What's your name?" the boy asked him.

"Charles Baron. What's thine?"

"Jack. Jack O'Brien. But Jack isn't my real name."

"What is then?"

Jack hesitated. He, too, disliked being laughed at. His Italian mother had most thoughtlessly christened him Giacomo and to be the victim of such a name seemed more ludicrous even than being a Quaker. "I don't think," he said cautiously, "that I shall tell you. Not to-day, at any rate."

"Don't, then. I don't care. Is that man who plays the violin thy father?"

"Yes."

"Is he a famous musician? Does he play at concerts?"

"Not now. But he plays at the theatre sometimes."

"The *theatre*!" Charles's eyes shone. "Oh! What theatre? I went to Drury Lane once."

"Only once? How strange."

"My father," explained Charles humbly, "does not allow us to go to the play at all."

* Jack O'Brien whistled. "Is that because he's a Quaker?"

"Yes. Because he's a strict one. Thee has no idea how strict."

The "thee" fascinated Jack; he knew as little about Quakers as Charles did of the theatre, and it was this mutual ignorance and desire for instruction that cemented their friendship. Jack, at thirteen, was a little conceited, but he was a good-natured boy, much flattered to find that Charles regarded him, on account of his stage connections, as a sort of hero. His curiosity about Quakers was soon satisfied; not so, Charles's thirst for theatrical knowledge. Philip O'Brien, Jack's father, had met many leading players, and although hardly as closely acquainted with them as his son chose to imply, the degree of intimacy did not affect the interest of the anecdotes, to which Charles never tired of listening. To hear great names, known to him only through the newspapers—names such as Macready, Kemble, Liston, Mathews and Kean—bandied about, was an enchantment. At every meeting he would greet Jack with a fresh bombardment of questions.

These meetings were made the more attractive by the skill required to arrange them, for, not unnaturally, Robert Alfred Lowe regarded his neighbours at Oak Tree Cottage with the strongest abhorrence. The dissipated-looking Irish violinist, who did not always return home sober; his swarthy wife with her habit of walking half-dressed in the garden; their three noisy, handsome daughters, one of whom he believed to be actually upon the stage; to say nothing of a crowd of raffish friends, were all so many thorns in the Quaker's flesh, and he would have thought it a sad breach of trust had any communication between his pupils and Oak Tree Cottage been established. But Friend Lowe, for all his learning, was slow

of wit; even slower of movement. And he was indolent. Once settled in the leather arm-chair from which he gave his lessons, he would feel disinclined to leave it. He welcomed any occasion to dismiss a troublesome boy from the room, making the term of banishment as long as possible, and, to save himself unnecessary exertion, would depute the task of locking-in the culprit to his nephew Edward.

Now Edward Lowe, an otherwise exemplary youth, was greedy. The plainness of his uncle's table, and the old house-keeper's careless cooking, tired him so sorely that he would sometimes dream at night of long, rich dinners. This weakness proved an easy one for Charles to play on. He had only to bring with him for use as bribes a few delicacies from the lavishly stocked larder at Bryanston Square, and he could have his own way. For a wine-jelly or a flaky game-pie, Edward Lowe might have committed quite serious crimes; for a mere cup-custard or oyster patty, he agreed, when incarcerating Charles, to omit the locking of the door. Then Charles, after waiting a few minutes and without the trouble of squeezing himself through the window, would make an easy escape and would join Jack O'Brien in the next-door garden.

These occasions becoming more frequent on account of Jack's school being closed by the fever, it was not long before Charles grew bold enough to go right into Oak Tree Cottage, where he made friends with the whole O'Brien family. Sitting in her untidy, over-furnished parlour, Mrs. O'Brien would make much of the "little Quaker" and share with him the sweetmeats which she kept constantly beside her. Charles never remembered seeing this lady fully dressed or with her magnificent hair in good order, but he enormously admired both herself and her bright wrappers, and was at first quite speechless in the presence of the three Miss O'Briens, who were all pretty, and as slatternly as their mother. His favourite, of course, was Katherine, or Kitty, the second daughter, who in addition to the blue eyes of her Irish father, possessed the more powerful fascination of being an actress; that she was

an obscure one, made no difference. And this merry girl of seventeen was Charles Baron's first romance.

His visits to the cottage had naturally to be short, complicated as they were by the fear that the bell, announcing luncheon or the end of lessons, might ring to find him still on the wrong side of the wall; but the very danger made them the more enjoyable. When Philip O'Brien was not occupied with a pupil, he would sometimes delight his small guest by playing to him, and the gay tunes selected by this friendly Irishman, more particularly the haunting melodies of Rossini, stayed in the boy's mind for ever. Charles was happier in Oak Tree Cottage than he had ever been before, even at Longdale, and the O'Brien family grew sincerely fond of him. Jack, indeed, even went so far as to reveal the shameful secret of his baptismal name.

After this friendship had continued for about two months, Charles was greatly excited by hearing Kitty O'Brien, who had been out of employment for some time, declare her intention of going next day to the Olympic Theatre. He learned that the management of this playhouse having been recently taken over by none other than his adored Madame Vestris, word had gone round among members of the theatrical profession that work could be obtained there.

"And so it can, I dare say, by the first-comers," Kitty's elder sister, Maria, remarked. "But what chance would *you* stand? There will be such a crush round the stage door that Madame won't even see you."

"I know that," said Kitty. "But have you ever known a crowd that I wasn't in the front of?" to which Jack added, with a grin, "She can certainly push, can our Kit. And kick, too, if it comes to that."

"I hope I can behave like a lady," his sister retorted.

"Oh, you *can*. I'm not denying it. The question is, will you?"

"Do not make the tease with your sister, caro," said Mrs. O'Brien in placid reproof and went on eating sugared almonds.

"Don't trouble yourself on my account, Ma, pray. We're all of us used to Jack's impudence. Though I must say it would be nice to have a pretty-behaved brother like some people I could mention." Here Kitty smiled so brilliantly at Charles that his heart seemed to turn over; but wonderful though it was to be so favoured by this fascinating girl, something of far greater importance occupied his mind.

"Kitty," he ventured a little breathlessly, blushing as he spoke. "Can I—I mean—is it——"

"Well, Charlie? What is the little Quaker trying to say? Come, out with it."

"Is it possible to—could anybody go?"

"Go where, child?"

"To the Olympic? To see Madame Vestris?"

"Lord, yes. Why not? One has only to stand at the stage door and wait till she comes in. They say she is at the theatre every day supervising the improvements, and that every down-at-heel actor in town goes there to try his luck. There's nothing to pay!"

As Charles was silent, meditating upon a stupendous idea, Jack continued to tease his sister. "Madame has only to set eyes on you, Kitty, and she'll lay the whole theatre at your feet. How could the poor woman hold out against your tragedy-queen expression?"

When Kitty had thrown a cushion at her brother and the family were talking of other things, Charles made an excuse to slip away. He had been only a short time at the cottage, but to-day he must take no risks. To-morrow, being Saturday, was a holiday, and he had already planned out what he intended to do. By some means or other he would go to the Olympic Theatre. He would join the crowd at the stage door and see with his own eyes the wonderful Vestris. He would see her close to. She might even smile at him. She might even speak. If she did neither, he would still have beheld in the flesh London's most famous comedienne. He hardly knew how to wait until to-morrow.

John Baron, who believed in making his sons hardy, would never, except in the most inclement weather, allow them to be driven to Chelsea or fetched in the carriage. They went on foot, and the walk, although long, was not unpleasant, for they crossed Hyde Park, had no crowded thoroughfares to negotiate, and were permitted, owing to William John's steady character, to go unattended.

As the two boys started for home that afternoon, Charles proceeded to take William John into his confidence, a necessary step in view of the magnitude of to-morrow's adventure.

"Thee cannot do that, Charles," William John said mildly.

"Who says I cannot? I will. Thee may be content to go poking along day after day doing the same dull things, but I am not. I'm different."

"Yes, I know." William John spoke with humility; he was very fond of his brother, always ready to help and shield him, and in spite of being four years Charles's senior, his attitude was an admiring one. The younger boy's brightness and daring shamed William John a little. But on this occasion he felt obliged to show some disapproval. "Listen, Charles," he said, "thee cannot go to that rough part of the town and stand gaping at a play-actress."

"Oh, can't I? Well, I will. What is there wrong about it?"

"Thee said thyself that there will be a crowd of actors there. And actors are disreputable people."

"Why should they be?"

"It's a shocking profession. We've often been told so. No gentleman ever becomes an actor."

"Thee knows nothing about it. Jack says that Edmund Kean's son Charles went to Eton and he is an actor now, and I know that Mr. Mathews, the comedian, used to visit King George."

"That may be. But this Madame Vestris is not an actor. She is an actress, and all actresses are bad women."

"That's a lie!" Charles exclaimed angrily. "Kitty O'Brien is not a bad woman."

"Oh, well." William John floundered a little; he had an uncomfortable feeling that Charles knew more about the subject than he did. "Perhaps that is so. But thee knows what Papa thinks about the theatre and how angry he will be if he finds I have helped thee to do such a thing."

"He won't know," Charles replied calmly. "Thee has only to ask permission for us to go out walking to-morrow, and to keep thy mouth shut. Papa never questions anything *thee* does and thee knows it."

This statement was so unanswerable that William John wavered. He badly wanted to please Charles because, as he was himself neither clever, strong nor amusing, it was only by being obliging that he could make people like him. For a moment he felt a little hurt that his brother, instead of calmly assuming that he should wait about for him and provide an alibi, had not suggested their going to the Olympic together. But William John was too humble to harbour resentment, also too timid to undertake an adventure so displeasing to his father. Before they reached home he had not only promised to ask permission next morning to take a walk with Charles, but to swear, if questioned, that they had both spent the morning in Hyde Park. And Charles, who never encountered any serious opposition from his elder brother, was blandly triumphant.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Enter Madame

WILLIAM JOHN, in warning Charles that the Olympic Theatre lay in a rough part of the town, had told the truth. Wych Street, off Drury Lane, could boast perhaps a certain decaying beauty, for its gabled Tudor houses, architecturally, were charming. Their occupants, however, were all too obviously uninterested in beauty, architectural or otherwise. Each house was dirty, down-at-heel and overcrowded. The street itself, airless and ill-drained, was narrow, the jutting gables on each side making it more so; it led from Drury Lane into Newcastle Street, a filthy thoroughfare occupied chiefly by old-clothes dealers, and the whole district would, but for the existence there of two important theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, have been shunned by decent people. If Drury Lane had its memories of pretty Nell Gwynn, the associations of Wych Street were more sinister; Jack Sheppard had been apprenticed to Wood, the carpenter, in an adjacent courtyard. And the neighbourhood still abounded in criminals as deplorable if less notorious, than Sheppard himself.

Perhaps the vile character of the street that housed it accounted for the Olympic's hitherto unfortunate history. No attraction offered there had yet succeeded in tempting fashionable London, and it was with this object and with a firm belief in her own powers of enchantment that Eliza Vestris had now acquired the theatre.

Charles, who had a good memory and a sufficient bump of locality, found his way to Drury Lane without much difficulty. He was tempted at first to take an omnibus along Oxford Street, but never yet having ridden in one of these

new-fangled conveyances, he did not, upon consideration, try the experiment. William John had been left in Hyde Park, consoled by a book and with strict injunctions to wait at one particular spot until his brother's return. The December day was raw and drizzling, but Charles, who walked fast enough to keep himself warm, found no room in a mind completely filled by the importance of his own project to worry about poor William John. The two boys had left Bryanston Square quite early, having been much favoured by an indisposition of their mother's, which promised to keep Margaret and Nurse Cox, now Sophia's personal attendant, closely occupied. Their father, who, on Saturdays, spent only a short time in the City, might return, but would be unlikely to question their whereabouts before the dinner hour of five-thirty.

Once in Drury Lane, Charles easily enough found Wych Street. And the Olympic Theatre. He stood outside for some time, examining the announcement boards, which bore, among others, the names of Vestris and of Miss Maria Foote, and described most glowingly the Quadruple Bill with which the playhouse was shortly to open. Besides the usual passers-by, some of whom paused to stare casually at these bills, Charles did not observe any particular crush of people. The doors of the theatre stood open; workmen bustled in and out, and crates were being unloaded from a wagon.

After waiting for some time, Charles stopped one of these workmen and put the all-important question. "Where," he demanded, "is Madame Vestris?"

"And what might you want to know that for?" asked the burly young fellow he had accosted.

"Because I want to see her."

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, so does a lot of others likewise. 'Aven't you seen the crowd wot's waiting for 'er ladyship at the stage door?"

"Stage door?" Charles repeated vaguely. He had supposed this to mean the entrance to the theatre itself.

"Where else, young shaver? You don't seem to me much

in the theatrical business, if you don't know the stage door's the one you want." The man started to move off.

"Where is the stage door, please," asked Charles, somewhat humbled.

"Down there, o' course." The workman jerked his thumb in the direction of a side street. "Turn to your left at the bottom, then left again into the courtyard. Only a blind bat could miss it."

The man went off in search of beer, whistling "Cherry Ripe," and Charles, obedient to his directions, made his way to the little courtyard behind the theatre and found this, as his informant had told him, to be full of people. No doubt on account of his size, Charles was allowed to push his way through and, reaching the stage entrance itself, he began to look around for Kitty O'Brien. But he could not see her. Two young women, one pretty and one fat, and both smartly dressed, smiled good-humouredly at him.

"Hallo, little man," said the pretty one. "And who may you be? A boy phenomenon?"

Charles blushed. Had the girl been less handsome he might have felt resentful of such teasing. "No," he said stoutly, "I'm not. But I want to see Madame Vestris."

"Lord! don't we all?" exclaimed the fat girl, who was exceedingly blowsy.

"I declare," said the pretty one, "I'm sick and tired of waiting in this filthy alley."

"Why not give up then and go home?" asked her friend with badly concealed eagerness. But the other tossed her head, replying sweetly, "No, my dear. I'll not give you that satisfaction!"

"And what good," put in a tall, gloomy-looking man with an unshaven chin, "do you young women expect to do for yourselves? Is it not obvious that madame must be well supplied with young women by now?"

"Who are you calling young women?" demanded the fat girl indignantly. "And for that matter, what good are you

expecting to do yourself? What good are any of these people expecting to do themselves?"

"As for these good people," returned the unshaven one, with great dignity and a majestic wave of his hand, "I cannot answer. As for myself, I can. Life is hard, and friendship does not always endure, but I tell you, young woman, that Eliza Vestris does not forget. Eliza Vestris does not forget." He spoke loudly, with all the mannerisms of a tragedian. There was a general titter.

"La!" As she spoke the pretty girl winked at Charles. "We ask your pardon, sir, I'm sure. My friend here had no idea of your consequence. But if it's not an uncivil question, sir, just what is it that Madame Vestris does not forget?"

The tragedian eyed her coldly. "That, child, is between Eliza Vestris and myself."

While still looking in vain for Kitty, Charles listened to all this with great interest, staring with even greater interest at the people among whom he stood, who, in spite of attempts on the part of most of them to achieve smartness, were a seedy crew. The crowd consisted of a number of young girls whose finery did not bear close inspection; a number of young men whose clothes, if elegant, were also threadbare; some old women, very much bedizened; some anxious old men, one of them really handsome, with a fine head of white hair, and a few ragged individuals who had come to offer themselves as sandwich men. There was also an extremely grimy dwarf. The little court buzzed with conversation, and when any one could, by judicious pushing, edge a little closer to the stage doorway, he did so.

From the snatches of talk that Charles overheard, he learned that many others beside the unshaven tragedian were on terms of close friendship with Madame Vestris. She was alluded to freely as Eliza, and one old woman, wrinkled and rouged, declared she had dandled her as a baby. A youth, almost in his shabby way a dandy, reiterated in a high voice, "Darling Eliza! I know her so well. Such a misfortune yesterday that

the dear creature did not see me! It comes of this shocking crush. She will be quite desolated to know I have waited so long." After these and similar remarks had been repeated a dozen times, in spite of the tragedian's haughty glare, the pretty girl said tersely, "Since you know Madame Vestris so well, why wait in this shocking crush at all? It must be beneath you to do so! Why not give your name and wait inside."

"Oh, well, you see——" muttered the youth, embarrassed. The girl laughed in his face.

There was a movement just then farther up the court, followed by cries of "Here she is," "She is come at last," "Madame has just got out of her carriage." "Vestris is coming."

Charles wheeled round, to see first of all a well-dressed man pushing his way through the people with the obvious intention of clearing a passage. "No, no, my good friends," Charles heard him say. "Madame cannot interview you. Her company is complete. I assure you, my angels, you are wasting your time here. Madame requires nobody."

"My dear William," declared another voice, warm and strong, that thrilled Charles to the heart, "do pray allow me to speak for myself. I can see nobody. I need nobody. But at least I am not dumb."

Then Vestris came full into Charles's view. Her gown was dark, of a soft brown material, richly graceful. Over her shoulders hung a magnificent Cashmere shawl, patterned with brown and primrose on a background of cream. Her hat, brown also, was relieved by a primrose feather—a colour scheme most deftly flattering to her southern type of beauty. Her eyes and hair were dark, her nose a trifle long; her mouth with its full lower lip, was charming; her complexion, a clear, pale brown, defied the world to call it sallow. Some strong, sweet perfume hung about her. One hand was covered with a leather gauntlet, the other, bare, was bright with rings.

As the actress passed through the crowd, people attempted to delay her with pleas of "Can you spare one moment,

madame?" "Oh, madame, I have waited so long to speak to you!" "Surely you have not forgotten me." Nobody, however, least of all the young dandy, put forward any definite claim to intimacy, nor did Vestris greet any one with special recognition. She merely smiled upon them all, showing her strong white teeth, and at last, on reaching the stage door, turned and said kindly, "I'm very sorry. There is not one vacant place. But leave your names with Mr. Ireland if you wish to."

She was about to go inside when the tragedian, undefeated, stepped forward. "You have not forgotten me, at least?" he asked her.

"You may leave your name. I have already said so." There was a slight edge now on the lady's voice. The fat girl and her pretty companion giggled; so did the high-voiced dandy. The giggle made Vestris pause to regard the man who had addressed her, with some attention.

"So you *have* forgotten me!" he exclaimed; theatrical though his voice and manner were, there was about him a certain stately pathos.

Vestris stared at him, then smiled. "No, Francis Finch," she replied coolly, "I have not. I once lent you five pounds."

There was a gasp and more giggling. Vestris checked it contemptuously. "There is nothing amusing about poverty," she said. "And this man you choose to jeer at was a fine actor once. Go inside, Francis. Perhaps I can put you in the way of earning enough to repay me."

She stood aside to let Finch pass, which he did without any sign of being abashed, and Vestris, turning to follow him, caught sight of Charles, who had been edging nearer and nearer to the door. The child, with his handsome face, excellent clothes and the expression of wondering adoration in his blue eyes, caught her attention. He stood out clearly from that shoddy gathering of theatrical failures and hangers-on.

"And what," madame asked him, "are you waiting for?"

"To see thee," Charles replied simply.

Vestris's well-marked eyebrows rose in amusement at the Quaker idiom. "Art thee?" she asked. "And so were all the others. What can I do for thee?"

Charles was scarlet; his words came out in a rush. "I didn't come here for work. I only came to look at thee—I mean you. I can't help being a Quaker because I'm not old enough not to be. I saw thee in *The Beggar's Opera* and I was whipped for it."

"What is your name?"

"Charles Baron."

"Then come inside, Charles Baron." Vestris put her hand on the child's arm, guided him through the door, along a dark, dirty passage where Francis Finch stood waiting, and up a short flight of stairs. At the head of these she opened a door revealing a room whose richness and luxury made Charles gasp. This quite large apartment was to serve as madame's dressing-room; at present its most prominent feature, a desk covered with papers, play-bills and correspondence, struck a note of incongruity against the rich hangings and lavishly upholstered chairs and couches. A brilliant array of lighted candles atoned for the day's dullness and the tiny window; there were flowers in abundance, among them parma violets and some superb roses. The room was warm, a little close even, but not unpleasantly so. The air was flower-scented.

"Well, my Quaker," said madame gaily. She sat down at her dressing-table before a large mirror, took off her hat, gave a casual pat to her dark curls and turned to Charles. "So you were whipped for seeing me as Macheath. And quite right too. Those breeches parts are not for little boys to look at. How came you to be at the theatre?"

"I went with Thomas, our footman, because he had quarrelled with Clara."

"Clara?"

"Yes, she is Thomas's intended—I mean she was. She has broken his heart."

"Alas, poor Thomas! You know, I am afraid you are a

bad boy, Charles. You have it in your eye. What brought you here to-day?"

"It was Kitty," Charles began; and, seeing that madame looked a trifle bewildered, he explained as coherently as possible all about the O'Brien family and Friend Onions, about his bribery of Edward Lowe, about the severity of his father and William John's connivance at that morning's adventure.

"Upon my word, sir!" Vestris seemed highly amused. "You have a most accommodating brother. You would not find many boys to wait patiently in Hyde Park on such a cold, wet day while their younger brothers went gallivanting after play-actresses. Why did he not come with you?"

"William John is shy." Charles, embarrassed, could not resist blurting out, "And he thinks all actresses are bad women."

"Indeed? I hope you will tell him the contrary. I think I could respect your William John." Vestris was still laughing. But before Charles could give more family history, there was a knock on the door and the man who had been with madame in the courtyard entered the room without waiting for her permission.

"Not now, William," said Vestris, "I am engaged with this gentleman."

Madame's able second-in-command, William Vining, grinned. "A child actor? He might be useful to us."

"Not this one, I think," replied madame. "Master Charles Baron is a highly respectable Quaker."

"Oh, but——" gasped Charles.

"Do you want me charged as a kidnapper?" Vestris said to Vining. "Do go away now, and come back later."

"But there is so much to do, madame. Planché is waiting for you to discuss the ballet. And the men have just now hung the great chandelier. Mr. Crace wants you to see it."

"So I will. Tell Mr. Crace in ten minutes. And I'll talk with Planché after that. What else?"

"These estimates——"

"Oh, don't confront me with *those*! You know I can't

comprehend them. Go away now, William, and I'll follow. And do pray order me some fresh roses. These are fading."

"If you will insist on such flowers in December!" Vining made a gesture of mock despair.

"I insist on them at all times. But if it will console you, order some from the Italian florist and let him send his bill to Tom Duncombe. And now leave me in peace."

Vining withdrew and Charles turned eagerly to Vestris. "Did he mean that?"

"Mean what, child?"

"About my being useful. Does thee need a child-actor?"

"Whether I do or not does not concern you, Charles. You are going straight back in my carriage to Hyde Park to find your poor, patient brother. And then, I hope, you will get safely home without another whipping."

"I want to be an actor," Charles said stubbornly.

"You are a child, my dear. That is a far sweeter thing to be."

"Oh, is it? Well, it is not. And I can act too, really, I can. I can declaim a great deal of Shakespeare."

Vestris only laughed. "So can most little boys. To be stage-struck is a very common malady. There is no distinction at all about that. But, on second thoughts, you may come and see me again."

"Oh! does thee mean that? When can I come? To-morrow?"

"How old are you?"

"Eleven."

"Then come and see me when you are eighteen." The boy's face fell. "No, child, I'm not laughing at you. There is something about you. I can never resist encouraging a promising young man to follow his bent. But I do not as yet corrupt little boys who have pious and respectable papas. Now you must go, my Quaker. And I am deeply honoured that you should have gone to this trouble to visit me." Vestris swept a deep curtsy.

Charles did not attempt to argue. With all her charm, her gay smile and frivolous clothes, there was a touch of authority about this handsome woman. So he merely replied, with a

docility that would have astounded both his family and Friend Lowe, "Very well, madame, if you wish it."

"There's my brave boy! Here, take this." She picked up from among a clutter of trifles on her dressing-table a small dagger—a flimsy enough piece of stage property, its handle studded with glass gems. "It belonged to Garrick. And I believe it to be lucky. Now get along with you." Vestris opened the door and, pushing Charles in front of her, called into the dimness of the stairway, "Tim! Are you there?"

"Yes, madame," answered the husky voice of the stage-door keeper.

"There is a boy coming down, Tim. Take him out to my carriage and tell the coachman to drive him where he wants to go. And then the carriage is to come back here for me. And send up the man who is waiting below. Finch, his name is. Now good-bye, Charles. We meet when you are eighteen. Be a good child till then, and obey your father." She stooped to kiss Charles on the cheek, in a motherly sort of way, and went back into her dressing-room, closing the door.

Charles stood there quite dazed until he heard Francis Finch come heavily up the stairway and the voice of Tim shouting to him from below. "Stir yourself, youngster, if you're there. I can't wait for you all day."

Still in a daze, Charles turned to go. In passing, Francis Finch gave him a pat on the head and asked with great condescension, "Well, young man, and how did your interview go?"

"Well enough," Charles mumbled shyly.

"You are in luck, boy, to have the ear of Eliza Vestris. She is a superb woman. And she never forgets!"

"No, sir?"

"Never! You heard her, did you not, just now? Ah, well, boy, good-bye. We may perhaps meet again. Who knows?" With a deeply impressive sigh, Mr. Finch prepared himself to knock on madame's door, while Charles went reluctantly downstairs to join the impatient doorman.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conversation with God

WILLIAM JOHN had taken cold. His loyalty to Charles had prevented him, except for an occasional short walk up and down, from leaving the meeting place arranged on; he sat there in the rain, feeling, by the time his brother returned, chilled to his very bones. Charles, full of his adventures, of the dagger, of the wonder of Vestris and the ride in her elegant carriage, failed to notice anything amiss, and, as he talked incessantly on their way home, William John shivered in silence. But when, by the end of dinner, his distress became so obvious that Margaret sent him to bed, Charles was immediately contrite.

The next morning, only Charles went to Friend Lowe's, which he did in charge of Farren, feeling both regretful and troubled; for, in spite of a certain contempt for William John's docility, he really loved his brother. He thought of him very much during the day, being altogether too subdued to merit banishment to the back room, and so lacked any opportunity for entertaining the O'Briens with his doings at the Olympic. When in the afternoon, Thomas, instead of the butler, came to walk home with him, Charles asked most eagerly after William John.

"'E's bad, Master Charles, very bad indeed." Thomas spoke with the enthusiasm always aroused by any form of disaster in his lugubrious nature. "The doctor's been," he went on, "and the maids was saying as what Master William John is in an 'igh fever."

"Thomas," Charles asked desperately, "does thee think he will die?"

"As to that, Master Charles——" began Thomas hopefully,

but, seeing the anxiety in Charles's eyes, he sacrificed to a sincere affection for his young master the pleasures of funereal conjecture and changed his tone. "What notions you do take, Master Charles, to be sure! Master William John is no more likely to die than what I am. It's only a feverish chill they say. Chills don't kill nobody." This was almost perjury on the part of Thomas, who quite genuinely believed chills to do little else.

"Are thee sure, Thomas?"

"Quite sure," replied the altruistic footman.

Charles walked on in silence; he had naturally intended taking Thomas into his confidence about the Olympic adventure, but this did not seem to him now a proper thing to do; the delights of yesterday were all too tightly bound up with William John's illness. So he said nothing, and the footman, both to enliven Charles and to ease his own feelings, started the ever-engrossing topic of his love affairs. Clara having remained obdurate, and Molly, the pretty housemaid, having spurned his advances, Thomas had now involved himself with a young woman called Prudence. "Although why Prudence, Master Charles," he said, "it's 'ard to tell, for she's certainly the flightiest thing in females I never come across. And that," he added impressively, "is saying something."

"Why do you like young ladies so much?" Charles asked.

"Why do I—well! That's a queer sort of question, Master Charles, and no mistake. That's a teaser, that is! Why do I like young ladies? Well, I never!"

"You haven't told me why," observed Charles.

"No more I 'ave. Well, it's like this. It's—well, you just wait and see for yourself, Master Charles, that's all." And these were the last words on the subject that Thomas could be prevailed upon to utter.

Once home, Charles ran straight up to see William John and found with alarm that his own things had been moved into a small dressing-room next door to Margaret. His brother must be very ill indeed, he thought, if they could not go on

sleeping together. And yet William John did not look ill. He had a fine high colour, his eyes were bright and he smiled cheerfully at Charles as if delighted to see him.

"I say," Charles began awkwardly, "I say, William John——"

"I haven't blabbed," said his brother.

"Oh, I didn't mean that. I knew thee had not. Thee never does. Only—I mean, I'm sorry."

"That's all right. I feel quite well, really, only so very hot. I shall be up to-morrow."

"Was it very cold in the park?"

"A bit. But thee need not worry, Charles. Did anything comical happen to-day? Did any one plague Friend Onions?"

Charles sighed with relief. William John was not really ill at all; if he was able to get up to-morrow and to ask questions about Friend Onions he could not be. He had of course taken cold; but nothing worse than that. And, ill or not, the fine fact remained that he was no tell-tale. Charles, with a rush of gratitude, said shyly, "Thee can have my watch if thee likes."

William John grinned. He had a watch of his own, in excellent working order; Charles had broken the springs of his some weeks before. The offer being none the less a handsome one, William John thanked his brother warmly while declining. Then quite suddenly he felt hotter than ever.

After dinner, when tea had been brought into the parlour, Sophia Baron, startled out of her own invalidism by anxiety for her favourite child, became exceedingly fretful. "I have always told thee, John Baron, that thee are too hard with the children. Janey and Charles are strong enough to go out in all weather, but William John is not. I cannot imagine what took him out for so long yesterday and on such a day."

Charles fidgeted guiltily. His father replied, "I did not find the day so cold. The boys must have been loitering. Were you, Charles?"

"Y-yes, Papa, a little."

"Then it was thy fault!" Sophia spoke with resentment. "William John always does as Charles pleases. Poor child! What if I were to lose him!"

"Thou must not be so foolish," said her husband sharply. "Thou art giving way as usual to hysterical fancies. William John has taken a severe chill, no doubt, but he will not die of that."

"Oh, Papa, are thee sure he will not?" The word "die" made Charles feel a little sick.

"We can be sure of nothing," was the discouraging answer. "Only God can be sure. But we will take good care of William John and pray for him. And," John Baron's voice grew waspish, "I hope that thou, Sophia, canst curb thy apprehensions. Thou hast quite a facility for turning a molehill into a mountain."

"And thee are most unkind! Thee knows my health will not stand such anxieties. Are thee sure, Margaret, that Doctor Marston understands the case? I often find him a little careless."

"I would have thee know, Sophia," put in John, before Margaret could answer, "that Doctor Marston is a most respectable physician. His carelessness, as thou chooseth to call it, is no doubt fatigue. Thou pesterest the poor man with trifles on his every visit."

Sophia, at this harsh attack, began to cry. "Trifles indeed!" she whimpered.

"Yes. Trifles. There is no better name for them."

Margaret attempted to soothe her step-mother, and Janey chose that moment to remark brightly, "If William John should die I'll be next eldest after Margaret."

"Hold thy silly tongue!" muttered Charles fiercely.

"Why should I? Hold thine!"

"Am I to have no tranquillity?" John asked coldly. "I will not endure this wrangling. Do you understand me, children? Janey, thou hast very little heart. And Charles, I desire thee to speak more civilly to thy sister."

"Charles is naturally anxious about William John," Margaret excused her brother.

"And what of my anxiety?" moaned Sophia. "No one considers me. Oh, my poor boy! My dearest William John! My nerves are shattered already!"

"Then I would advise thee to go to bed." Her husband opened a book.

It was a troubled evening. Shortly before the children's bedtime, Nurse Cox, her face startled and anxious, came to fetch Margaret from the parlour. And into Charles's heart crept a cold sense of fear.

William John became very ill indeed. He had rheumatic fever. Doctor Marston and the apothecary were in constant attendance; Margaret and Nurse Cox, relieved at times by Hannah, cared for the boy with great devotion. Sophia, although incapable of being of use to any one, ceased to complain. Even Janey was more awed than inquisitive. John's face looked drawn and grave, and Charles begged most humbly to be allowed to stay away from Friend Lowe's; he could not bear to leave the house in case William John might want him. Not only was this request granted, but Charles, by making it, gained the approval of his father, who, surprised to find so much heart in his younger son, liked him the better in consequence.

The illness dragged on painfully day after day. At times there was some slight improvement, at others a relapse, William John wandered a great deal and would also remain for hours unconscious. The fever did not break.

One evening, after many wretched days, Charles, crouching sadly in the passage near his brother's door, saw John Baron come out of the sick-room and, observing how grave and tired his father looked, spoke to him timidly. "Papa?"

"Well, Charles?"

"How is my brother?"

"He is no better yet. I wish I could tell thee something different."

"Oh, Papa! Is—is there no hope for him?"

John laid his hand with unaccustomed gentleness on Charles's head. "I cannot tell thee, my dear. We must ask God. Wilt thou come with me to my study and pray for thy brother?"

Charles stifled a sigh. He did not really want to pray for William John, because he was uncertain whether doing so would be of any use. Besides which, his father's sonorous mode of intercession usually made him giggle. As he was clearly expected to agree, however, and being encouraged by the unusual softness of John's manner, he went with him to the study and knelt there, listening to what seemed to be a quite one-sided conversation with God. It would have been so much better, Charles thought, had the Almighty, just for once, returned some sort of answer; even an abrupt or unfavourable one would have been better than nothing. But He chose to be silent. John Baron, rising at length from his knees, dismissed his small son kindly.

Charles went thoughtfully to the little dressing-room where he now slept. In spite of his doubts on the subject of prayer, he could not help dwelling on what he had heard, recollecting in particular and with some discomfort how his father had made a point of William John's illness being a possible visitation upon the Baron family for sins committed. Now this was disturbing. Charles knew, of course, that no other member of the family was sinful; even Janey, although too curious, and spiteful, never did anything really wicked. So he himself, in view of his excursion to the Olympic Theatre, which had resulted directly in William John's fever, was the person responsible. He must be. And while still clinging to the possibility that God did not exist, Charles found himself obliged to consider, as a further possibility, that He might. In which case He would have to be reckoned with. He would have to be placated.

Charles chose the conventional method first; kneeling by the bed, he made a full and free confession of his visit to Vestris and of his having persuaded William John to wait for him in the park. He hoped, knowing God's fondness for repentance, that this would appease Him, but the old trouble of talking, apparently, into space, without the least hope of an answer, spoiled everything, and Charles rose from his knees with the sensation of not having been attended to. But wishing to judge God fairly, and dwelling on the probability of some inaudible response, he decided after a few minutes to investigate. On his way to William John's bedroom on the floor above, he heard Nurse Cox's voice from the landing, and stopped to listen.

"No, Mr. Farren," said nurse, who was talking to the butler, "the dear lamb ain't no better. It's my belief he never will be."

"You must pray, nurse, you must pray," replied Farren, a very religious man indeed.

Nurse Cox answered him a trifle pettishly. "I have prayed, Mr. Farren. Night and morning I've been on my knees asking God to spare that blessed boy of mine. But he's still no better."

Farren began to speak again, doubtless to upbraid such lack of faith, but Charles did not stop to hear him. He returned sadly to his own room. Nurse Cox had confirmed his own opinion; God did not listen. William John was no better and Charles, having failed with God, was faced with the alternative of confessing to his father, a prospect so alarming that he sat down on the bed to think about it. The mere notion of telling John the truth almost took his breath away. He was so used to being punished severely for what to his mind were minor offences, that he could hardly imagine what the penalty of causing William John's death would be. An endless vista of whippings, of bread and water, of loss of pocket money, opened before him; for, even in the unlikely event of William John's recovery, his sin would still be counted as serious; the fact would still remain that he had gone off,

in pursuit of a play-actress, leaving his brother to catch cold.

For a moment Charles felt that he could not confess this. Then he knew that he must. Because if he did not, and William John died, he would be culpable. He would have left unturned a possible, if terrifying, stone. He *had* to do it.

In order to brace himself for the ordeal, Charles took from the wardrobe, where he had hidden it, his precious dagger. Fingering the jewelled handle, he remembered that Vestris had said, "I believe it to be lucky," and took heart a little. He thought, too, of his beloved Shakespearian heroes, of Mark Anthony and Brutus, of Hamlet, Coriolanus, and Henry V. They would not surely have flinched from such a small matter as confession. They would have gone to their papas with high heads and flaming courage. And so, decided Charles, would he.

He replaced the dagger and left the room, but as he passed by Margaret's open door, she called him in to her.

Margaret should have been sleeping. She had watched for hours by the bedside of William John, until Hannah, at last, almost forcibly, ejected her from the room. But she was not in bed. Still wearing her plain morning dress, her hair disordered, her face drawn with fatigue and with a stronger emotion, she sat over the fire, turning a letter listlessly in her hand. "Come here, Charles," she said.

"Only for a moment then. I have to go downstairs." Charles, having made up his mind to confront his father, had no wish to defer the awful moment.

"I thought thee might stay with me a little," Margaret said wearily. "I am so tired, Charles. And so sad. What has thee to do downstairs?"

"Does thee think William John will die?" he asked her bluntly, knowing that Margaret at least would not refer him to God.

"Oh, Charles, my darling, I can't tell thee. He is very ill. But the doctors have not yet given up. They think the crisis may be very near."

"I must go downstairs," Charles said again. His courage flickered.

"Why, my dear?"

"I—I must find Papa."

"Papa?" Margaret was surprised. She knew that, as a general rule, Charles kept out of their father's way. "But I think he is in his study."

"I know he is."

"Then thee had better not disturb him. What does thee want with him?"

Charles stared hard in front of him trying to blink back the tears that would come. Although he had hoped to hear from Margaret that William John was, after all, better, he had not meant to confide in her or in any one else. He had meant to go bravely to his father. But now, on being questioned, his feelings were too much for him.

"I must disturb Papa," he said chokily. "I have to tell him."

"Tell him what?"

"About William John. About its being my fault if he dies."

"Charles! What does thee mean?"

Then it all came out. The expedition to the Olympic, William John's long vigil in Hyde Park, and Charles's recent encounter with his father. Shaken by the tension of the last few days, the boy sobbed as he told the story, and when he had finished Margaret drew him to her. "And thee wants to tell all this to Papa?" she asked.

"Yes. Don't thee see, Margaret, that I *must*? I don't think it's much use really telling things to God. I don't believe He listens. But I know He expects one to confess. So I must tell Papa. I *must* confess."

"But thee has, Charles, to me."

"That will not do at all." Charles meant that Margaret, however shocked by his revelations, would neither punish him nor even be seriously angry. To confess to Margaret was too easy. It would not count with God.

"But," his sister asked him, "does thee not know that Papa will be very angry?"

"Oh, yes. Of course he will. He'll—well, I don't know what he will do to me. That's why I have to tell him."

Margaret, still twisting the letter in her hand, was thinking; she did not really believe that John Baron would punish Charles or even be so very angry. She knew her father's religious fervour. She had noticed how, since William John's illness, his manner towards the younger boy had changed. The child's confession might very well be regarded as a sign of grace, might even lead to a better understanding between the two. And Margaret, half-ashamed of herself, did not want this to happen. Charles was hers. All now that she had. She shuddered suddenly to realise that Charles, not William John, might have been dying, for she could not, just then, think of anything more terrible than losing him; nor could she, just then, face losing even the tiniest portion of his confidence and love, or sharing a shade of his affection with another.

"No, Charles," she said deliberately, her voice cool and steady. "I do not think that thee should tell Papa at all."

"Why not?" Although relieved, Charles also felt disappointed. He had so firmly intended to carry his act of heroism through.

Margaret silenced her conscience. "He will be so harsh with thee, dear. He will punish thee so severely. What good can that do? What good can it do to poor William John?"

"But if it saved him?" her brother persisted.

Margaret, almost without faith herself, hesitated to shake the child's, slight though she knew it to be. She tried instead a different line of persuasion. "Does thee not think, Charles, that this would distress William John if he recovers? He may do so yet. And he never told, did he? He never said a word."

"No, indeed he did not. William John never blabs."

"Then isn't it a pity to blab—to tell, thyself? William John held his tongue for thee. Thee would show more gratitude to him by holding thine."

"I never thought of that." Charles was now clearly conscious of relief.

"Well, thee should think of it. There is no need to grieve any one further. Thee knows the secret is safe with me. And thee does not want to be punished."

"No, but—but perhaps I ought to be." A little sheepishly, Charles brought out this noble sentiment.

"Nonsense, my dear!" Margaret, after a slight struggle with her better feelings, added, "Papa is always hard on thee, as thee knows."

"Yes," Charles said bleakly, "I do know. I wish he would not be. I wish he was oftener like he was just now."

Margaret's conscience hurt her again. She guessed, in fact she even knew, that her interference might crush the growth of an affection between Charles and his father. She ought, of course, to leave the boy free to pursue his honest design. But she could not help herself. "Let us forget about it," she said very sweetly. "That will be best."

"But," Charles spoke with wavering obstinacy, "are thee sure, Margaret, are thee quite sure about God? Are thee sure that if I went to Papa and confessed He might not stop William John from dying?"

Margaret wanted to cry. She was exhausted and unhappy, but a new hardness in her kept the tears in check. "I am quite sure, Charles," she said a little coldly, "that nothing thee can do will make any difference to William John. He may live or he may die. Nothing any one can do will alter that."

Charles was impressed. He had such a habit of trusting his step-sister that her uncertain attitude to religion had started originally his own doubts. He felt that Margaret knew. If she said confession was useless to save William John, why then it almost certainly was. His belief in her, on this occasion, was opportune, for his courage, during the delay, had fled. "Very well, then," he told her, "I shall not say anything."

"That is the best. And when thee are in trouble again,

Charles, come to me. *I understand thee.*" Perhaps Margaret was conscious of having corrupted her brother a little; perhaps she was not. But uppermost in her mind was something else—deep gratitude for an escape from loneliness. She could not have faced the very shadow of an estrangement from Charles, for this would have left her utterly alone in that most bitter isolation which follows the destruction of hope. She glanced once more at the letter in her hand; then threw it on to the fire. Priscilla Ellesmere had written it to tell her that Daniel was to marry Catherine Leigh.

Charles, who had been thinking, spoke to her. "Peg," he said eagerly. "I have an idea."

"What is it, dear?"

"The dagger! The dagger I told thee of, that Madame Vestris gave me."

"Well, Charles?"

"I would like thee to take it to William John. Madame said it was lucky. If I gave it to my brother it might save him. Oh, let me give it to him, Peg, please!"

"But——"

"*Please!* I'll go and fetch it."

"Very well, Charles, if thee wishes it so much," agreed Margaret, smiling faintly.

Charles rushed next door to fetch his treasure. A lucky dagger might beat God yet.

William John did not die. And he most generously insisted on Charles remaining the owner of the dagger.

1831

INTERLUDE

From Margaret's Diary

FEBRUARY 18th. Charles returns to-morrow to Friend Lowe's. We do not think dear William John will be strong enough to resume his studies there until the spring. He is to go next week with my step-mother, and Nurse, to Brighton. It is very pretty to watch Charles's concern for him.

February 19th. Charles tells me that the O'Brien family has left Oak Tree Cottage and from what he says I gather that they did this without paying the rent. Charles is much distressed by their departure, but I can only be thankful, for they were, I am certain, most disreputable people. I must endeavour to turn my brother's interest from the stage, although I cannot help wishing that Papa would sometimes allow us all to visit the theatre. It would afford a distraction.

February 20th. I have heard that Daniel is to be married in April. Why should this trouble me?

March 22nd. We have been invited to Daniel's wedding. My father consulted me before declining. Oh, how I wish he would not speak of it! Janey, who had looked forward, I suppose, to the pleasures of such an occasion, is most vexed that we are not going and in consequence is sulky.

I have been unhappy all day and find that time hangs heavy. Papa's disapproval of music is very hard to bear. Reading grows wearisome and few things console one better than fine music. William John and my step-mother return from Brighton to-morrow.

April 9th. Daniel's wedding day. I made every possible occupation for myself but the hours would not pass. I wonder

how he looked. And how he felt. Did he, I wonder, think of me at all? And yet why should he? Had he loved me truly he would have shown more patience. He will take Catherine with him to Cousin Samuel Ellesmere's—to those very rooms we planned to furnish together. Oh, Daniel! I will not think of thee.

April 13th. Cousin Priscilla wrote most kindly and gave me an account of the wedding. She did this, I am sure, to steady my mind, but the effect was not as she intended. However, I shall soon learn not to think of Daniel. I wonder if Charles confides more in William John than in me. I have noticed lately that they often talk privately together. Charles has been sadly wilful and constantly angers Papa.

July 23rd. (At Longdale.) Daniel came to-day with Catherine. I thought him somewhat confused at meeting me and I hardly knew how to confront him. He is thinner, but I still think him handsome. Catherine is very much the matron. Cousin Priscilla told me that the Cliffords will not be coming this summer. I am heartily glad to hear it.

August 5th. Caroline was married to-day to James Leigh. A most sweet wedding. She had her sisters, two of James's, and Janey as bridesmaids. I could have been among them but had no heart to. Little Martha behaved most sedately, and Caroline, all in white, looked like some lovely lily. How James loves her! There was dancing in the evening after the bridal couple had driven away, and every one was happy. I have come up to bed early and feel much fatigued. A wedding at which one is neither bride nor bridesmaid is a dull affair. How radiant Caroline looked! She is indeed fortunate to be so adored. I doubt if Catherine made so sweet a bride.

August 9th. I overheard Daniel and Catherine from my window discussing domestic matters. How such details must deaden romance. I shall never marry. Charles is as usual very happy here and full of sweetness. I want no better society than my brother's.

1832

February 11th. We heard to-day of the birth of Catherine's baby. A boy. I shall visit her. Hannah has complained again of Thomas's carelessness. But I cannot dismiss him for Charles would grieve so.

February 18th. Saw Catherine's baby. Very red, but a fine lusty child. His father's pride was almost laughable. After all, any woman can have a baby. Oh, Daniel, Daniel! On coming home I wanted Charles to read to me but he would not give up his chess with William John. What company a very young child would be.

May 2nd. Friend Lowe has called upon my father to complain of Charles. I feared there would be serious trouble, but William John spoke up for Charles to Papa. He declared Friend L. to be a poor teacher and begged Papa to send Charles elsewhere for instruction. To my astonishment he was listened to, and Charles only mildly reprimanded. Had I made such a plea on my brother's behalf my father would have been angry. It has been arranged that after the summer holiday, when William John goes to read at Oxford, Charles will be found another tutor. I am glad of this for he grows daily more restive and idle. His mind is, I fear, still much set upon the stage. He cuts out from the old copies of *The Times* all references to the theatre, and I found in his room a poem (unfinished) addressed to Madame Vestris. I thought it good; but I must *not* encourage this obsession. The stage is not a proper calling for any person of refinement. I have bespoken my summer dresses, but who will care to see them?

June 4th. I have to-day received an offer of marriage which I refused. It was made to me by William Burton, a most worthy man, who is much esteemed by Papa. A Plain Friend, and this, I fear, in more senses than one. Charles calls him "Jelly-belly." I made my refusal as kindly as possible, and hope that my father will not discuss the matter. I do *not* wish to marry.

June 17th. Most shocking news! My dear Cousin Caroline is dead. She gave birth to a little child—stillborn—and died a few hours afterwards. It is hard to believe that any one so lovely, so full of joy and so made to be loved, is gone. Poor James! Poor Caroline! And yet I almost envy them, for their love was so perfect while it lasted. *They* had no misunderstandings.

September 13th. Charles is gone to his new tutor's. As the establishment is at Elstree in Hertfordshire he will sleep there, returning every Saturday in time for dinner and remaining with us until Sunday evening. How empty this house will seem without him, and how monotonous my life will be. I mentioned again to Papa my wish to take up some form of charitable work but he would not listen. He seems most set upon my having no sort of interest outside home affairs.

October 1st. Charles tells me that Mr. Macready, the actor, resides at Elstree. He has been off on the sly to try and catch a glimpse of the famous man in his garden. Fate seems determined to keep my brother's interest in the stage alive!

1833

June 9th. Sunday. Charles came home from Elstree yesterday. He looked so gay and handsome but I fear he is not working. However, as Papa is from home, nothing has disturbed our peace. It is quite sad to see how my step-mother brightens as soon as he goes away. There seems to be little pleasure or affection in their marriage.

Charles, taking advantage of my father's absence, went out last night—I suspect to the play. I also suspect that he coaxed Thomas to sit up for him but I made no inquiries. It is so very pleasant to turn a blind eye! I excused Charles to-day from going to Meeting and had in consequence to endure a scene with Janey, who accused me of injustice. I am afraid she is right.

July 18th. I read an account of the great Italian violinist—Paganini—who gave a concert last night at Drury Lane. How I would love to hear him. Catherine told me on her last visit here that Daniel had promised to take her. How sweet her life must be with such a kind and tolerant husband, and so many pleasures to share together. Oh, Daniel, I was a fool! We go to Longdale to-morrow. I would give anything to stay away.

December 12th. More trouble over Charles, whose tutor is displeased by his lack of progress. On his last Saturday at home, my father beat him, and Charles flew into a passion at the indignity of this and struck Papa. As a result, he was confined all Sunday on bread and water. I went to talk to him through the door but he sent me away, and accused me of treating him like a baby. Papa, finding I had been to him, violently rebuked me. Even William John could not restore peace, and Janey seemed to find amusement in the general distress. Thomas wept to see Charles so hardly used.

1834

February 4th. Charles has yet another tutor. This time at home, in order, my father says, to remove him from the distracting company of other boys. Charles is very sullen and threatens to plague the new teacher's life out. I have no doubt he will. The man does not look strong.

As a contrast, William John is working most diligently at Oxford. When I asked Charles if he envied him, he said no. He would have liked to enter the university itself, but since Quakers are debarred from this, he would not care to be at Oxford at all. I often think how different my brother's life would have been had I been able to take him to live with me and Daniel. Catherine is expecting another child.

August 20th. (At Longdale.) Caleb announced this morning that he is engaged to be married. The lady is a Miss

Hickman of Brighton and the news rejoiced us all. And yet I am a little tired of marriages and engagements.

Daniel has looked troubled for several days and I fancy there may be some strain between himself and Catherine. I cannot think her the right wife for him. She resembles Martha of the Bible and has very little gift for conversation. Daniel walked in the garden with me to-day, and in spite of some awkwardness it was very sweet to be near him. He seemed anxious to tell me something but did not do so.

August 21st. My entry yesterday was wicked. Daniel is nothing to me. I shall not speak of him again in my diary. Charles went with Robert and Samuel to help the men with the harvest. He grows so brown and strong in the fine country air. How very dearly I love him. Daniel and Catherine seemed more affectionate towards each other.

November 1st. William John has been home from Oxford and is most unwell. I fear his strength will never quite return. His mother fusses over him absurdly but I must not blame her. No doubt he consoles her loneliness as Charles does mine. Papa complained again about the dinner. I must speak seriously to the cook.

1835

January 8th. Another change for Charles! His studies at home have been so misdirected that he is to be sent back again to Elstree. He no longer, he tells me, cares what happens to him.

Nurse Cox seemed most unwell this morning and has kept her bed. Poor soul! My step-mother tries her sorely.

January 9th. Nurse still so unwell that I sent for Dr. Marston. He is concerned about her. Charles and Janey quarrelled and she carried a story about him to Papa. Charles was sent to bed. This, at fifteen, is too bad.

January 15th. Poor Nurse died early this morning. How

grievous it is to lose a faithful old friend. I am afraid she wore herself out in our service. Papa was deeply moved and very kind and gentle in consequence.

June 5th. Our house is full from floor to ceiling. We have as usual given hospitality to Friends come here to attend the quarterly meetings. The servants are all grumbling at the extra work, and Janey is most provoked at having to give up her room. It is certainly no pleasure to me to share my bed with her.

A letter from Cousin Priscilla to tell us that Amelia is to be married.

July 1st. My father will not accompany us this year to Longdale. He proposes to go abroad with a select group of Friends who will speak to notable persons in Switzerland and Holland against war and capital punishment. I wish he would see the importance of peace and mercy in his own home. His treatment of Charles grows harsher, and he proposes next year to put him in the bank. I wish my brother could be sent instead to Ellesmere, Boon but did not dare suggest it.

Daniel—Samuel Ellesmere would, I know, treat him wisely.

1836

February 1st. Papa tells me that now William John has finished with Oxford he is to stay at home and study as he pleases. I understand naturally that his poor health disqualifies him for any serious profession, but it is hurtful to see how Papa favours him in contrast to Charles. My step-mother is, of course, rejoiced at having her favourite kept near her. I ventured to-day to send £50 of my own money to Mrs. Fry to be used for the benefit of female prisoners.

April 5th. Janey came to my room to-night and wept because no one has asked her in marriage. She is an unhappy, discontented girl, and I do not know how to help her. I tried

my best to-night and begged her to cultivate a pleasanter manner. But she merely imagined I was finding fault, and finished with an outburst of jealousy against Charles.

January 30th. Charles is to start work to-morrow at my father's bank. I wonder for how long he will support it.

CHAPTER NINE

Charles is Eighteen

IN the summer of 1837 a young Queen came to the throne of England, the Barons went as usual to Longdale, and Charles became eighteen. His birthday fell late in August, and the Ellesmeres, a family who revered all anniversaries, made a most happy celebration of it.

On the occasion of the Barons' first visit following Daniel's marriage, Priscilla had looked forward with some anxiety to her son's meeting with Margaret; but her fears were groundless. Of the two cousins, Daniel, who had consoled himself so hastily, betrayed the more embarrassment; Margaret, with a new, cool assurance, showed no distress whatever. Her manner to Daniel was friendly, to his wife courteous, and if Catherine Ellesmere had any suspicion of being her husband's second choice, she never showed it. A domesticated young woman, possessed of much common sense and by no means wearing her heart upon her sleeve, she made a conscientious wife to Daniel, a careful mother to his children.

Mrs. Clifford and her daughter had not visited Longdale since the summer of Margaret's engagement; the lady may have sensed her unpopularity there or may merely have evaded what was, to her, the tedium of her sister's establishment; whatever the cause, she had spent the last six summers elsewhere. But this year, being a trifle concerned for Rose's health, and having engagements of her own, she sent the girl, now eighteen, to Priscilla. Rose had become a young lady of fashion. A ceaseless round of balls, dinners, water-parties and theatres, although she revelled in it, had so tired her, that she soon found herself in spite of an assertion that Longdale would bore her to death, enjoying its very tranquillity. Yet this is hardly true. Rose did not lend herself to tranquillity, she dis-

persed it. And country life might have fulfilled her gloomiest expectations but for the fact that young Charles Baron was at her feet.

William John, in a different fashion from his brother, also admired her; he regarded Rose as an object of beauty, showing little desire to know her better or even to talk to her. In fact, only the girl herself, a careful student of men, knew that he noticed her. But Charles made small secret of his feelings; so little indeed, that Priscilla Ellesmere grew troubled. A marriage into the "world" would, she believed, put the last touch to John Baron's dissatisfaction with his younger son. She took what comfort she could from the certainty, that with regard to Rose, Mrs. Clifford aimed higher. On first coming to Longdale the girl spoke frequently of a wealthy baronet, Sir Harry Tempest, who had paid her great attention, but as the days passed, and Charles grew more devoted, Priscilla heard the baronet's name less often.

The pleasures of this summer owed much to John Baron's absence. He had once again gone on a missionary tour abroad. This time, to Germany and France.

Charles's birthday was celebrated by a picnic; some of the party in carriages and some on horseback repaired to a magnificent pinewood in the direction of Petworth, where the servants had gone on ahead to spread a cold luncheon underneath the trees. It was a perfect day, cloudless and still. The women, all in fragile muslin dresses, gave a flowerlike appearance to the scene. Samuel Ellesmere had brought his violin, playing on it the old-fashioned country tunes that were his mother's favourites; Martha, now a plump girl of thirteen, had invited friends of her own age, and the children of Daniel and of the eldest Ellesmere daughter, Susannah Kent, played happily together.

Priscilla sat by her husband with her well-loved spaniel, Rufus, beside her; watching the merry party and delighting in the presence of her grandchildren and sons and daughters, she felt utterly content, until the sight of Rose Clifford and

Charles Baron together at some little distance from the others disturbed her peace. Rose had disposed herself prettily on a fallen tree-trunk, while Charles lay in an adorer's attitude at her feet. The girl, Priscilla freely acknowledged, was lovely, with a polished, calculated beauty quite unlike that of her own dead Caroline. Rose's gown, a lilac muslin, had been cleverly chosen to accentuate the violet greyness of her eyes and to show to best advantage her auburn hair, which was dressed with most artful simplicity. Her niece's exquisite complexion Priscilla had to admire; but she suspected, and rightly, the use of rice powder to improve it. Rose's eyebrows arched charmingly; her nose turned up the very slightest bit; but her mouth, a most revealing feature, contradicted itself, the upper lip being a trifle thin, the lower full and childish. Her hands were white and very beautiful.

In order to display her curls, Rose wore no bonnet but, having learned through her mother's scoldings to avoid sunburn, kept well in the shade. Compared to the other young people with their fresh, high colouring and simple clothes, she seemed exotic; the conscious grace of her pose upon the tree-trunk brought the boudoir to the pinewood; and Charles, despite a suit from his father's tailor, a Quaker who considered extreme elegance of cut ungodly, somehow matched her. These two were different, to Priscilla, almost ominously so. And to Margaret also. From her place beside Susannah Kent, Charles's step-sister watched him closely.

Margaret's good looks remained, but they had hardened. She was paler than formerly; the lines of her mouth were set and had lost much of their sweetness. Now, only in rare moments of merriment did she resemble her mother. She dressed well, handsomely even, but beyond her years. At thirty, she appeared some five years older.

"Rose and your brother make a pretty couple," remarked placid Susannah, who, completely happy herself, liked others also to be, and rejoiced particularly at seeing handsome young people together.

"Yes, they do indeed." Margaret spoke lightly, affecting a lack of interest which was far from sincere. For some days now she had been aware of Rose's lure for Charles and, knowing her brother, anticipated grave trouble should his fancy deepen. She heartily disliked Rose Clifford; the vain little girl, whose precocious preference had flattered Charles, had grown into exactly the type of young woman to arouse her animosity. But, disapproving of Rose, Margaret could envy her too. This girl, she guessed, would have the world at her feet and take from it what she wanted; no sacrifice to duty, no division of affections, would ever hold her back; probably nothing would ever move her deeply, and yet how very deeply she might move others. Margaret, a woman, saw no good cause for this beyond astute coquetry and a brilliant beauty, but, admitting both the astuteness and the beauty, she feared Rose the more. "If she hurts Charles," she told herself fiercely, "I will kill her."

Rose and Charles, unaware of any special interest in themselves, were talking. "To work in a bank!" Rose said disdainfully. "So tedious and undistinguished! How can you?"

"Thee would not be so scornful about it if the bank were mine."

"And will it be?"

"Yes, of course," Charles replied. "Mine and William John's. That is, if I can stick to it."

"Which you will not," Rose prophesied shrewdly. "You will never work hard enough to become rich."

"I don't know that I care to."

"You'd better. Then all the ladies will love you!" Rose gave him the flicker of a provocative glance. "If you don't want to be a banker, what do you want to be?"

"An actor." Charles had never quite relinquished this ambition, although the way to its fulfilment seemed as remote as ever; but he kept the stage in mind, reading dramatic criticisms and whatever plays he could surreptitiously lay hands on. He would sometimes posture grandly before a mirror with Garrick's dagger, and had even contrived a couple

of undetected visits to the theatre. He had seen *Hamlet* played by Macready and had caught several stolen glimpses of this eminent tragedian at Elstree; had even on one occasion travelled in the London coach with him and been privileged to hear an altercation between Mr. Macready and a passenger, the proximity of whose valise to his feet annoyed the actor.

As for Madame Vestris, Charles had naturally followed her career with great interest; but a second attempt to see her act had been frustrated, for he had found on going to the Olympic that the house was full, and had been obliged to content himself with a visit to Astley's. Madame still retained, however, the highest place among the stage celebrities who peopled Charles's mind. Did he not know her? Had she not said to him, "Come and see me when you are eighteen"? To-day, he was eighteen; yet, the idea of becoming an actor remained "such stuff as dreams are made of," and would continue, he feared, to do so.

"An actor?" Rose was incredulous. "You're joking."

"I'm not. I've always wanted to be an actor."

"But you can't be. You're a gentleman."

"What difference does that make?"

"A great deal of difference. Gentlemen don't go on the stage, or write or paint either, for that matter."

"Why, Rose, that's rubbish. What of Sir Walter Scott and Mr. Edward Bulwer?"

"Oh, well—some men of good family do write, perhaps. But they must have been odd to start with. Most writers are vulgar."

"Thee knows nothing about it," Charles said crossly. "I wish I could write myself. I wish I could write like Boz." *The Pickwick Papers* had become his Bible.

"He certainly isn't a gentleman. How could he be and write of such common people?"

"Has thee read any of his work?"

"No," Rose admitted, and before Charles could take her up,

continued, "I don't wish to. I like only genteel novels like Mrs. Gore's or Miss Austen's."

About to make a sharp retort, Charles changed his mind; or perhaps a sudden shaft of sunlight brightening Rose's hair changed it for him. "We are beginning to quarrel again." He spoke a little sadly.

"I know." Rose sighed. They were often in disagreement.

"I don't want to quarrel," said Charles after a brief silence.

"Nor do I."

"Then let's not do it any more."

"I often wish," Rose told him gravely, "that you were different."

"Different? How?"

"I wish you were not a Quaker."

"I'm not."

"Aren't thee?"

"Oh, that! It's just a custom we have to keep to in my father's house."

"Is he as strict as ever?"

"More so. At least with me."

"Poor Charles!" Rose's hand just touched his hair, but only just. She was extremely judicious with her favours.

"Rose!" Charles's voice was urgent, for the touch had misled him. But the girl spoke coolly. "You should have more ambition. You should break away."

"I shall, never fear. Would it make a difference to thee—to you?"

"To me? Why should it?" Rose sounder cooler than ever, but, as Charles looked at her, she blushed.

The picnic was followed after dinner by a dance. Richard Ellesmere, on hearing his wife had arranged this method of prolonging the celebration of Charles's birthday, remonstrated with her mildly. "Thee knows, love," he pointed out, "what our cousin's views on dancing are. I do not think thee should encourage his children to disobey him."

Priscilla smiled comfortably. "It is natural for young

people to dance. And I do not think Charles and Janey will go long through life without it. We have had dancing often enough before while they were with us."

"Yes, yes. But as to-day is Charles's birthday, it seems more marked. And with John himself away."

"We must try not to miss him," was Priscilla's wicked reply, and Richard argued no longer. So sweetly virtuous a wife and mother must be allowed, he felt, the one small sin of encouraging the younger Barons to dance.

A number of neighbours were invited for the occasion, and Janey Baron, surveying her best gown before the mirror, felt sick with dissatisfaction; not being in the habit of dancing, she had naturally no dress that was quite suitable. The one she wore, light in colour and pretty enough, displeased her; it lacked daintiness, bore no resemblance at all to the fashionable clothes of Rose Clifford. The old jealousy of her childhood flared up in Janey. It was cruel, it was unjust, that one girl should have so much, another so little. As at thirteen, so at twenty, Janey hated Rose.

She was herself no longer strikingly pretty. Her flaxen charm had scarcely developed; yet, although too sharp featured, too insipid of colouring, to make a beauty, she was young and graceful, and the dress became her more than she imagined. But her face, the resentment in her eyes, the sullen droop of her mouth, marred the mirror's picture. She turned from it crossly.

On her way below, Janey passed the open door of Rose's bedroom; this was empty, and on the bed lay a very tangle of silks and laces, artificial flowers, gay shawls, ribbons and satin slippers. Miss Clifford, it would appear, had found selection from her extensive wardrobe difficult. Janey stopped on the threshold to eye the finery, a bitter, almost ugly, expression on her face. Then she turned sharply and went downstairs to dinner.

Dancing began directly the meal was over. On so fine an evening the French windows of the Long Parlour stood open

and at times a couple would walk together on the gravel path outside. Most of the older people sat upon the lawn, from where they could hear plainly the gay sweetness of the music. Margaret sat with them; she chafed no longer at her father's prohibition, for one did not, at thirty, recommence to dance.

William John also stayed away from the Long Parlour. It came naturally to him to do as he was told, and besides, never having joined in surreptitious practice with Charles and Janey, he could not dance at all. He sat on the lawn listening with no very great attention to what was said to him, and thinking about Rose Clifford.

An elderly gentleman, who had recently ridden for the first time upon a railway, described his experience, appearing to think that the new steam coaches had been invented exclusively for his benefit. "I shall make a point," he announced impressively, "of travelling by no other method."

"But surely," suggested Richard Ellesmere, "the railroads do not at present serve many parts of the country?"

"Then I shall stay at home until they do," replied the enthusiast firmly.

"Do you not find the excessive speed alarming?" asked James Leigh's mother.

"The speed, madam, is not excessive. The companies forbid it. I am told on the best authority that an engineer who attempted forty miles an hour was summarily dismissed. That's as it should be! The railways must be kept safe. They are the hope of the future!"

Rose, William John was thinking, had looked so lovely at the dinner-table in her stylish white satin with flouncings of delicate lace. Priscilla and the other women had thought the gown immodest; they expected every minute to see it slip from Rose's shoulders. But William John had admired both the dress and its wearer, although noticing with some contempt her efforts to hurt Charles.

For Rose, in order to efface the memory of a blush, had flirted and had, with a most deplorable levity, chosen James

Leigh to flirt with. Such conduct, even more than her dress, had provoked the general feeling of hostility towards her, since, James's fidelity to his wife's memory having become so sure and settled a thing, no member of the Ellesmere circle could countenance an attempt to enslave him. If this attempt was not, in James's case, successful, it had succeeded all too well in angering Charles, who, taking the only revenge possible, avoided Rose in the ballroom, where plenty of other girls, only too willing to forgive his lack of proficiency on account of his good looks, danced with him. Chattering to this one and that, he affected to ignore Rose, while she, genuinely puzzled by his neglect, looked in his direction oftener than was wise. Charles caught her doing this and preened himself. And when at last he could no longer keep away, Rose, as she watched the handsome boy approach, felt a sweet, strange excitement that was new to her.

Before Charles had even spoken, she exclaimed impulsively, "I thought you were never going to ask me to dance."

"What makes thee think I am now?"

Rose coloured at his insolence. Young men did not speak to her like this. They simply did not do it. And yet, instead of indignation, a sharp distress overwhelmed her, giving her no chance to stand upon her dignity. The music started. Charles, without speaking, led her out. The touch of his hand moved her afresh; and, conscious of a conflict less of her head and heart than of her head and passions, Rose prepared to do battle against his fascination.

"You have a great deal to learn about dancing, Charles," she remarked lightly when, for the second time, he started to move out of turn.

"I know that. What chance do I get, though? Papa forbids it."

Rose smiled unkindly. "It strikes me that you must make up your mind about something."

"What is that?"

"Whether to be an obedient son and a good Quaker, or a

young man of fashion. It is laughable to be neither one thing nor the other."

"Then I will spare thee the humiliation of being laughed at with me." Charles, hurt and angry, almost hating Rose, left her abruptly just as their turn came to go down the dance. He walked straight out of the room into the garden.

Rose was astonished; and when one or two people, seeing her so brusquely deserted, smiled, and when she caught the spiteful eye of Janey Baron, she was angry as well. Not wishing to stand there in the set without a partner, she also stepped hurriedly into the garden, realising too late that this must seem a calculated pursuit of Charles. She then felt angrier than ever and stood alone on the gravel, tapping her foot with vexation. Here William John found her.

"Oh, William John," she begged, "please dance with me."

"I? But I can't. I don't know how to."

"I like you the better for admitting that. Will you walk with me on the lawn instead?"

"Certainly, if thee wishes." William John stepped back on the grass and began, with Rose beside him, a sedate walk to and fro. The bright lights streaming from many windows illuminated the garden clearly.

Rose twisted her fan. "Have you seen Charles?" she asked.

"Yes. He came out of the Long Parlour just before thee did. He seemed in a hurry."

Rose went on twisting her fan. William John spoke again, his voice quiet and detached. "Thee has been treating him badly, I suppose?"

"And why should you suppose so?"

"I watch things. I have very little else to do. And I am fond of Charles."

"Oh, William John, so am I!" Rose was amazed at herself for saying this; amazed, too, at her own emotions, which had ceased already to include anger.

"I wonder," William John said gravely, "if thee really are. I know thee are fond enough of being admired."

"Why do you think so ill of me? Why does every one here think ill of me?"

"Do they?"

"You know it. The way they look at me! Margaret and Janey—all of them indeed. Even Aunt Ellesmere wishes I would go away. And she is the kindest."

"Cousin Priscilla thinks badly of no one," William John replied. "As for the others, perhaps they envy thee."

"Can I help being pret—" Rose broke off, ashamed of her vanity.

But William John pursued the matter calmly. "No, thee cannot help being prettier and more elegant than the other women here. But I think thee could help making such use of thy advantages."

"What do you mean?" Rose, bred from childhood to display her beauty, to concentrate on charming, was very nearly innocent of any deliberate offence.

"Thee hast not been brought up as we have," explained William John. "So naturally thee are different. But thee does make rather much of that difference. Especially in thy manner with men, if thee knows what I mean."

"You mean I flirt? So does Mary Priscilla."

"Yes, but more kindly. I do not think my cousin would play with any man who really loved her."

"Do I?"

"Oh, Rose! Charles is in love with thee and thee knows it. And that is the cause of Margaret's dislike, I'm sure. Thee should not encourage him."

"Why not?" asked Rose a little shakily.

"Because thee means nothing by it."

Rose tortured her fan. After a long pause William John asked her, "Does thee mean anything by it?"

"I don't know," she whispered. "I am not sure."

William John sighed. "My father will be very angry if Charles does not marry a Quaker."

"Your father is always angry! Charles has a right to marry whom he pleases."

"Then thee are serious, Rose? Thee would marry him if he asked thee?"

"Who said so? *I* most certainly did not. Besides, he has not asked me."

"Shall we go indoors?" said William John.

Charles did not return to the Long Parlour, and at midnight the dancing ceased. As the guests began to disperse, the Ellesmeres stood in a merry crowd on the front-door step watching the carriages drive away, and afterwards, with much chattering and laughter, the household retired to bed.

That night, instead of undressing, Rose paced the floor. Her thoughts were in a turmoil. In London her reputation as a coquette had pleased her; at Longdale it appeared unaccountably disgusting. It had shocked William John, whom she respected, and had wounded Charles, whom she perhaps loved. Rose went to her window. The night, moonlit and warm and richly scented, bewitched her. The country might be tedious, but its beauty melted one's heart. She did love Charles!

And then she saw him. She saw him walking slowly up and down upon the lawn; the moon was clear and Charles, as he stepped across patches of its light, looked sad. Rose knew that he was sad because of her. She felt a little triumph, but she felt pity too, and the same sweet weakness that had assailed her when he held her hand. She took a shawl from the bed and went downstairs.

It was Richard Ellesmere's pacific custom to leave his doors unlocked, for, believing that men stole only from necessity, he expressed by this lack of caution his willingness to share with those in want. No one had ever robbed him. Rose slipped into the Long Parlour, set her candle down and opened the window. Again the beauty of the night possessed her. She saw Charles and, across the moonlight, ran to him. She ran as a girl in love, outstripping easily the young lady of fashion.

"Rose!" The boy, seeing her, exclaimed in wonder.

"I must not stay," she told him breathlessly. "I must not stay a minute. I only came to tell you I was sorry. I didn't mean to be unkind. I never meant to hurt you." Suddenly shy, she would have left him had not Charles seized both her hands.

"Why has thee come to tell me that?" he asked her.

"Because I was sorry. Because I wanted you to know it. Let me go, Charles. I must go back indoors."

"Why did thee come?"

"I told you. I——" She could not escape; he was holding her hands too tightly.

"Answer me. *Why?*"

"Because I love—because I think I love you." Rose clung faintly to her caution, but Charles hardly heard her. He had her in his arms. He kissed her. And she knew that she loved him.

The boy and girl clung together. And it was Charles, not Rose, who broke away. For a moment they looked at one another, both a little frightened. Then Rose ran swiftly back to the house, while Charles, watching her, stood still.

They did not know that some one indoors had seen them. Janey turned away from her window filled with curiosity and malice. And envy too. It was shocking, of course, disgusting even, to run out to a man like that, to be embraced so hotly in the moonlight; yet how romantic it must be, how flattering! With a contemptuous glance at the sleeping Mary Priscilla, Janey lit a candle, got out her diary and with a hand that shook a little, noted down, "Rose Clifford is a wanton. I have just watched her embracing Charles upon the lawn. It is long past midnight. She must be very bad indeed. I wonder if I ought to tell Papa."

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On the next day Rose displayed embarrassment. Charles neither showed nor felt it: naturally confident, Rose's submission to his kiss had made him more so. He spent the morning trying to talk to her alone and finding her so elusive

that it was afternoon before he achieved his object, which he did finally by the simple expedient of asking her, in the presence of other people, to walk with him to the orchard. Rose was a little flustered; she did not wish to attract attention by a refusal, and so, less sure of herself than ever before, accepted. As the two strolled away across the lawn together, Margaret, sitting under the great cedar, watched them sombrely.

"What is the matter?" Daniel, who had come up unobserved, stood near her. He, too, watched Rose and Charles, and the sight hurt him.

"The matter? What does thee mean?" Margaret asked stiffly.

"I thought," Daniel told her, "that thee were troubled. I have thought so for some days."

Margaret was startled. She had been unaware that Daniel thought of her at all or noticed how she seemed to be feeling. They never talked privately together.

"Thee are mistaken," she said shortly.

"Oh, no, Margaret, I'm not." Daniel sat down. "Thee are troubled about Charles and Rose. Any one can see that."

"And if I am?"

"I am sorry, that is all. I know, I have good reason to know, how much the boy means to thee."

Margaret looked at her cousin. This reference, the first he had ever made, to their broken engagement, amazed her; she had supposed him, quietly content with his wife and children, to have almost forgotten it. She had not herself forgotten; but that was different, for there had been no rapid transference of affection to console her. Looking at Daniel now, she saw a bitter expression in his eyes, and was silent, having nothing, or too much, to say.

Daniel continued. "I know how important Charles is to thee; but that he should be drawn to Rose is only natural. Don't oppose them. It is natural for those two to be in love. They are both so young and handsome and ambitious."

"Ambitious? Rose is, no doubt—to make a fine marriage.

But not Charles, surely. I fear he is too lazy for ambition."

"He is lazy because he does not like his work. He could be very ambitious."

"For what?" Margaret asked, a little vexed to hear Daniel speaking with such authority on the subject of Charles.

"Not for advancement in the banking business, certainly. Charles will strike out for himself."

"Has he confided in thee?"

The suspicion that lurked behind her question made Daniel smile wryly. "No, not at all. But thee must permit me to be observant. Thee might also permit me to offer thee a piece of advice."

"And what is that?"

"Do not interfere."

"Who says I have interfered?" Margaret asked hotly.

"No one. But I think thee would like to. Don't, Margaret. First-love is very beautiful. It should not be tampered with."

Margaret's anger struggled against her sadness; her love for Daniel had been her first, and how harshly, through others, had she tampered with it. What irony there was, too, in this conversation! Here was Daniel trying to help her with the management of her brother, the very task to undertake which she had broken with him! Did he think, then, that she had made a failure of it? Some words he had spoken came back clearly—"Does thee think Charles will thank thee for thy sacrifice? Does thee think, when he has plans and desires of his own, he will remember it?" She tried to speak, but again, with a little helpless movement of her hands, said nothing. And her eyes filled with tears.

"Do not interfere, Margaret," Daniel repeated gently.

"How can thee be so foolish?" Margaret had lost no time in fighting her weakness. "And so sentimental? Thee knows how outraged my father would be at the mere hint of such a marriage. The Cliffords are not Friends, and Rose is a most frivolous girl. I think she is heartless as well."

"Perhaps. But if Charles has chosen her, he may defy his father." Daniel sounded eager, even faintly malicious.

"But if he should do that, he might——" Margaret began brokenly.

"He might leave home. I think it very likely. He is a young man now, not a boy. And he will never reconcile his ideas with Cousin John's." The malice was stronger now; an old wound had reopened, paining Daniel, who, to do him justice, believed that Margaret's had healed.

"Then I should lose him." Her voice shook a little.

"That," Daniel pointed out relentlessly, "is bound to happen. Not this time, perhaps, but certainly the next. All love grows away from one, Margaret, except the true love of a husband for his wife."

She rose abruptly. "Thee are a husband thyself. I think thee talks to me strangely."

Daniel rose too. "Thee need not teach me to honour my wife. But I have loved only one woman." They faced one another, both angry now and both unhappy; both knowing such talk between them to be useless and unbecoming; both stirred in their own secret hearts because a boy and girl had fallen in love.

"Forgive me, Daniel," Margaret said suddenly. But Daniel did not seem to hear her. He had looked away and seen Catherine, one child in her arms and one beside her, coming from the house. Daniel hurried to meet them. There was always Catherine, and Catherine was safe. But Margaret, left behind under the cedar, felt quite alone.

Rose sat with Charles in the orchard near to the place where he, long ago, believing that Margaret would desert him, had cried.

"Does thee remember that morning?" he asked her.

"Yes. You were hateful to me. You told me to go away and leave you alone."

"But thee did not go."

"No. I must have been a forward little wretch."

"Thee were not!" Charles declared warmly, forgetting how often the small Rose had vexed him. "It was like thee to stay with me. Could thee not always do that?"

"Do what?" asked Rose a little awkwardly.

"Stay with me. Stay with me always. Marry me?"

"Oh, Charles, don't talk so wildly! How can we think of getting married? You have no——" She hesitated.

"No what? I think thee means no money. Is that what thee started to say?" Charles's anger was rising already; the girl maddened him, with her surrender of the night before, her prudence now.

"No, Charles. I didn't mean that precisely. But you're so young."

"Only a month or two younger than thee."

"It's different for a woman. All girls expect to marry young. But you have still your way to make. I know your Papa is rich, but——"

"I did not bring thee here to talk about money."

"But since you have asked me to marry you, we must. Cannot you see that it's impossible?"

"Why? Because I have no money of my own and have my way to make, or because thee does not love me?"

"I—oh, Charles—we must not be foolish."

"Thee were ready enough last night to be foolish," Charles said roughly. "It was not I who asked thee to come out into the garden."

Rose's eyes blazed. How right her mother was! One had only to show a man the smallest tenderness and he treated one lightly. "I came," she said frigidly, with a slightly absurd hauteur, "because I had been rude to you, which is ill-bred. I wished to apologise."

"Thee came because thee could not help thyself." Charles was a match for her. "And because thee wanted to. It was not a very modest thing to do."

"Oh!" Rose felt completely at a loss. She had naturally

expected Charles to be humbly grateful for her favours; and now to find him taking them for granted, even slightly depreciating them, dumbfounded her. "How dare you!" she demanded weakly.

"I dare because it's true, and thee knows it Rose, darling, be thyself. Be sincere." Charles moved closer to her. "Thee likes me to kiss thee, does thee not?"

"No. I do not. I hate it. I will never let you kiss me again."

"No?" His eyes mocked her.

"Please leave me," Rose ordered faintly.

"No," said Charles and kissed her. She was again defeated.

They sat until nearly dinner-time in the orchard, and when they left it were walking hand in hand. Charles, headstrong and positive, had been talking about marriage, and Rose had listened. The prospect, after his kisses, seemed less impossible than before them. Charles might not have control of money, but his father had plenty to give him; the Barons might not be aristocratic but they were certainly solid. And her mother might not, therefore, consider it such a mis-alliance after all. Rose, walking back to the house, hinted as much to Charles.

"Thy Mamma?" he said, as if the mere thought surprised him. "It is not her consent that troubles me. It is my father's."

"Why?"

"Because he will never give it. He will forbid me to marry thee. He will forbid me to marry any one who is not a Quaker."

"Oh, that!" Rose dismissed such an objection as absurd, which, in all honesty, she thought it was.

"It matters more than thee thinks," Charles told her gravely. The very fact that Rose had accepted him increased his sense of responsibility; he would soon have a wife and wives must be supported. And so, anticipating a real breach with his father, he was prepared to face the possibility of leaving the bank, of finding another profession. But what? Rose would never marry an actor.

"You really think," she asked, "that he will try to prevent our marriage?"

"I know it."

Rose felt a little indignant. It had pleased her vanity to believe that all the opposition would be on her mother's side.

"But never mind, my darling," Charles was saying gaily. "It will all come right, of course. In spite of every one. Only I think perhaps we had better keep it a secret. I should not like my father to hear of it in any roundabout way. He would only be the more against us."

"A secret? Why, yes, of course it must be." The notion pleased Rose's caution. "We'll tell nobody of it for the present."

"We'll tell nobody," Charles repeated, and pressed her hand.

Upstairs he found Margaret wandering aimlessly about his bedroom. "Where has thee been?" she asked him.

"Out," Charles replied tersely; aware that Margaret had seen him go to the orchard, he guessed what was on her mind.

Margaret was in a state of strong apprehension. Her brother and Rose had spent a long time together. Was it possible that they had come to some understanding? "Was Samuel with thee?" she asked stupidly.

Charles raised his eyebrows. "No."

Margaret, fidgeting with some books on the bed-table, inquired apparently at random, "Are thee ambitious?"

"Ambitious? What an odd question, Peg!"

"I don't think so. I should say that many people were not. William John, for instance."

Charles laughed. "I hope I am more ambitious than that dear old jog-along! But why does thee want to know?"

"Oh, for no reason really. But it would distress our father so much if thee thought of leaving the bank."

"I've said nothing of that." Charles felt uncomfortable; Margaret seemed to be reading his thoughts.

"No, my dear, of course not. But I wish——"

"Well, Peg, what is it?"

"I—it would be easier for me, for all of us, if only thee would apply thyself. If only thee would endeavour to give Papa more satisfaction."

"That's all very well. But when does anything I do give Papa satisfaction?"

"I know he is hard. But thee could still try. If only for my sake."

"I'd do most things for thee, Peg," Charles said warmly enough.

"Then promise me, dear, not to—not to do anything that would be rash, that would anger thy father unnecessarily."

"Oh, no, I will not anger him unnecessarily." Charles stressed the last word a little. "I can promise thee that."

Margaret dared not press the matter; she saw that Charles had no confidences to spare her, that he had no wish to prolong the conversation further. And she, almost as eagerly as her brother, welcomed the dinner bell.

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CHAPTER TEN

At Bryanston Square

ON a dull November morning Margaret Baron rose directly the housemaid had called her; after waiting impatiently while the girl drew back the curtains, closed the window which was kept slightly open at night, and set out the bath, she prepared to get up at once.

"Thee can do the grate later," she said. "I shall not need a fire this morning." The housemaid withdrew.

Margaret began her toilet with a cold bath; the sharp sting of the water dispersed all traces of sleepiness and although her father considered the practice a dangerous one she would never forego it. After the bath and standing in her petticoats she brushed her hair—not for long, because it was brushed for at least fifteen minutes each night—and finished dressing with her habitual neatness. She then went down to see Hannah.

The Barons kept eleven servants. Nurse Cox had been replaced by Hester as the attendant on Sophia Baron, a most intensive occupation, for although the lady's health grew no worse, in fact, a trifle better, her whims increased; Hester, respectful, and deeply impressed by illness, was far more popular with her mistress than old Nurse had been.

Hannah's position as housekeeper was now, owing to Margaret's capabilities, almost a sinecure, but she took it seriously enough, reigning in state in her own room, waiting to some extent on John Baron's daughters, more particularly on Margaret, and harassing the two housemaids. Thomas had been promoted to first footman and was, with his underling, Henry, under the butler's direction. Farren recently had become a Friend, thus infuriating Hannah, who, having herself

contemplated this step and being bound on all points to disagree with the butler, remained reluctantly Church of England. Mrs. Mead, the cook, a jovial soul, was assisted by a very young kitchen maid. The coachman, Farren's brother, had his own son as groom.

Margaret had slept very little. A paragraph in the *Fashionable Intelligence*, announcing the return from Scotland to Hertford Street, Mayfair, of the Hon. Mrs. and Miss Rose Clifford, and their intention of giving a ball there, had haunted her all night. Did Charles know this, she wondered. The ball was to be held quite shortly—on Thursday the ninth of November.

Only two days after Charles's birthday, Rose, at an urgent summons from Mrs. Clifford, had left Longdale, so that Margaret's observation of the girl's intimacy with her brother had received a check. Would Charles renew the friendship now in London? Had it been more than friendship? How definite an understanding had there been between himself and Rose? The repetition of these questions kept Margaret awake, and it was an urge to forget them and be busy, that had sent her to the housekeeper's room so early. The maids were still sweeping the staircase as she went down; Thomas and Henry just beginning to lay the breakfast.

Hannah's room on the ground floor was small, comfortable and very full; for besides the furniture provided for her, the housekeeper had many personal possessions; ornaments, miniatures, an elaborate flower-stand, samplers, albums, a large portrait of Queen Adelaide and a collection of indifferent pewter bequeathed her by an uncle. Her cat, Sambo, a very large cat, slept in a very large basket. By way of other livestock some fat goldfish decorated an enormous glass bowl. Hannah, herself a very large woman, seemed to chose her household gods in proportion. A spicy smell pervaded her apartment, and came from the cupboard where a supply of certain choice provisions was kept under lock and key.

The housekeeper, stiffly arrayed in black poplin, was seated

by the fire. "Why, miss, how early you are this morning!" she exclaimed, on seeing Margaret.

"I slept badly."

Hannah eyed Margaret with concern; being romantically inclined, she attributed her favourite's slightest indisposition to the broken engagement of seven years before. "You look ill, miss," she said sympathetically. "Let me make you a cup of tea."

"Nonsense, Hannah. I'm not ill at all. And never mind the tea. Let me look over those bills."

"The kettle's on the hob," remarked Hannah unnecessarily, for the kettle always was.

"No, no. Don't tease me, Hannah. Give me the bills." Margaret sat down at the housekeeper's little table.

Hannah, with a small mutter of disappointment, obeyed, but she only waited until Margaret bent over the household accounts to begin again. "I declare, Miss Margaret, you must have something on your mind. You've been brooding."

"Don't be so foolish, pray. Three shillings and sixpence for a pair of soles is far too much."

"It is indeed, miss. Mrs. Mead bought those. You recollect that damp morning when my rheumatics were bad. But I shouldn't have trusted her. Cooks have such extravagant notions!"

"Well, please see that it does not happen again, Hannah. And I do not think so many pounds of beef should have been used in the kitchen."

"Nor they should, to be sure! But you know how the lower servants eat, miss. That Thomas has the appetite of a whale!"

"Mrs. Mead must be more careful. I do not want to stint them, though, remember."

"As if you ever do that! But you know how it is, miss. As long as the master will pay the bills those servants will guzzle. And that Thomas has broken a cup. Out of the best Berlin service. He gets more careless every day and that Farren

thinks nothing of it. I do believe he would have let the cup slide if I hadn't happened to see it."

"Thomas is careless, I know," Margaret said quietly; "but thee must not forget he is a very faithful servant. He is devoted to Charles."

Hannah sniffed. "He is always ready and willing enough to cover up for Mr. Charles's scrapes if that is what you mean, miss."

"I mean, Hannah," Margaret corrected her mildly, "that Thomas would always serve my brother. Not merely 'cover up scrapes' as thee chooses to think."

"What shall I charge him for that cup?" asked Hannah.

"Nothing."

"But, miss—it is one of the best. You should not permit such carelessness."

"Really, Hannah! I think thee forgets thyself. I have given thee an order."

"Very well, Miss Margaret." Hannah could not conceal her annoyance that Thomas's salary of twelve pounds a year remained in this case intact; she believed that all servants should be treated severely. But she could see this morning that Margaret was not herself. Her eyes turned longingly towards the kettle—a cup of tea would soon put all to rights.

"We will have a loin of pork for dinner, I think," Margaret suggested. "And a dish of turbot before it."

"Yes, miss. Could you not see the doctor when he comes to the mistress to-morrow?"

"The doctor? Why should I?"

"Because you look so pale, miss. And you're not sleeping either. Oh, Miss Margaret, dear, you should not fret so!"

"Oh, Hannah, dear, thee should not fuss so!" said Margaret laughing. "I am very well. And happy too. Now does that satisfy thee?"

"I suppose it will have to," replied Hannah glumly.

Margaret patted her hand. "I would let thee know soon enough if anything were amiss."

"I hope you would, miss. I do indeed. You must know by now that I would do anything for you. And go anywhere with you."

"I do know it, Hannah. There is the bell. My father must be on his way downstairs."

John Baron, at eight o'clock every morning, read a chapter from the Bible, requiring his whole household, whether Quakers or not, to listen to it; only Sophia, who did not rise until after eleven o'clock, was exempt from attendance. The reading over, and on the stroke of a quarter-past eight, breakfast was served and John, a hearty eater, enjoyed this meal far more than his family did. This morning as he discussed cold partridge following on three boiled eggs, his children, eating more modestly, were conscious, each in their own way, of depression. Charles most of all. He was crushed by the thought of beginning another long, dull day at Baron's Bank.

"Charles," remarked his father suddenly, "thou art dawdling. Thy horse is at the door." Charles always rode to the city, starting half an hour ahead of John and thus making a suitable compromise between the directors who arrived in their carriages and the clerks who came on foot. John, except in wet weather, drove in the whisky, leaving the carriage for his wife and daughters' use.

Charles bit hurriedly into a slice of buttered toast; when his father's attention had returned to the partridge, he scowled.

"Thee are half-asleep still and no wonder," said Janey. "Thy light was burning late enough."

"Is there anything of interest in *The Times*, Papa?" William John asked quickly, but not quite quickly enough.

"We will speak of the news later. What is this about a light? Thou knowest, Charles, that I require all candles to be put out by midnight."

"Charles was still burning his at two o'clock," said Janey.

"And how does thee know that?" asked Margaret, frowning at her.

"I woke up with a headache and went to the medicine chest to find some drops."

"That isn't much of an excuse for spying," Charles told his sister scornfully.

"Is there a good account of last night's debate in the House, Papa?" persevered William John.

"One moment." John Baron laid down his paper. "Spying is an ugly word, Charles. Thou shouldst not use it to a woman. What wast thou doing with a light at two o'clock?"

"Reading." This was half the truth, for Charles until the small hours had been writing to Rose Clifford, with whom, since her sudden departure from Longdale, correspondence had been unsatisfactory; the Cliffords had moved about so much and Rose was somewhat stilted with her pen. Charles, knowing of her return to London, and in the hope of seeing her shortly, had poured out his soul. Then torn the letters up. But he had also read a little.

"Reading?" John asked. "What wast thou reading?"

"*Rienzi*."

John glowered; although unacquainted himself with the novels of Edward Bulwer, he believed them to be unwholesome; the author, rumoured to be a worldly and dandyfied individual, was responsible among others for an immoral work called *Eugene Aram*, written in partial extenuation of a murderer! John said sternly, "Thou knowest I dislike fiction. And I will not have thee reading anything so late at night. Thy work is not so well done that thou canst afford to lose thy sleep. This must not occur again, remember. Is there another slice on the breast of that bird, Margaret?"

Margaret went to the sideboard to attend personally on her father. Charles finished his breakfast sulkily. This treatment was unbearable! He was no longer a child to be told what he should or should not read, at what hour he should extinguish a candle. He was a man. Not only that, he was a man worthy of something better than his tedious existence at the Bank. Had not a celebrated and lovely woman believed he might

make an actor? Charles dreamed for a moment of a theatrical fame, so startling as to impress even his father. But, resolutely, he put the picture from him. He was in love with Rose and meant to marry her, and she had said "No gentleman ever becomes an actor." Rose must come first. Charles sighed at the impossibility of reconciling love and ambition and, to relieve his feelings, kicked Janey under the table.

After breakfast, when Charles and his father had left, Margaret, according to her daily custom, went to her step-mother's room. Sophia, propped up against a profusion of pillows, had been eating her breakfast with some zest, but she put down her knife and fork on hearing Margaret's knock and began to toy languidly with a roll. Any interruption at her meals annoyed her, for she enjoyed these thoroughly, keeping the well-cleaned plates a secret between herself and Hester.

Sophia's room was close; the fire, never allowed to go out, burned fiercely; the windows were shut and some scented toilet water smelled stalely sweet. The bed with its great weight of coverings looked untidy. Shawls, scarves and dressing-gowns were lying about. Nurse Cox had always kept her mistress scrupulously neat; Hester did not. And Sophia, who hated any kind of effort, rejoiced in the change.

At three-and-forty Sophia Baron looked an old woman. A cap concealed her fair hair, now streaked with grey; her face was lined; her mouth drooped miserably. She took for the most part little care of her appearance, though having the whim at times to dress herself with a too youthful elegance. In bed, however, her vanity seemed dormant.

Margaret, hating her morning visits to the hot, untidy room, would never shirk them. "Good-morning, Mamma," she said cheerfully. "Is thy breakfast as thee likes it?"

"Good-morning, child. I suppose it is nice enough. But I have no appetite as usual."

"Shall I ring for Hester to take away the tray?"

"No. Thee need not do that. She will be here in a few minutes. Perhaps I ought to finish this roll." Sophia looked

longingly at the partridge she had barely touched; fortunately it was cold and could be consumed peacefully later.

"How has thee slept?" Margaret put her next routine question.

"Oh, my dear child! Sadly! I think perhaps thee had better send for Doctor Marston."

"But to-morrow is the day for his visit, Mamma. And he did mention that he was very busy."

"Busy indeed! Do any of his patients pay as well as we do? He had no right to be busy. And he must give me something to make me sleep." The doctor, who never prescribed a genuine opiate for Sophia, did sometimes calm her with a so-called sleeping draught; composed principally of sugar and water.

"Does thee not think a drive would do thee more good? It is such a mild day." Margaret glanced through the window where a soft winter sunshine brightened the dispersing fog.

"No, I do not. I shall not venture out to-day at all."

"Very well, Mamma. I will tell William John. He had intended to drive with thee."

At the mention of her still favourite child, Sophia's expression changed. "Well, perhaps in that case I will go," she said, her voice softening; but she added in deference to her self-pity, "I should not care to disappoint dear William John."

Margaret sighed with relief. She proposed, once her step-mother was out of the house, to take Hester to task on the state of the room and set her, assisted by the under-housemaid, to clean it. There might almost be time to turn out Sophia's sitting-room as well. She must warn William John to be as entertaining as possible.

Then Janey knocked on the door and entered.

"Good-morning, Mamma," she said, bending over to give her mother a perfunctory kiss.

"Thee does not ask how I slept," Sophia remarked peevishly.

"How did thee sleep, Mamma?" Janey, perhaps excusably, since the answer never varied, hardly waited to hear it. She

turned instead to Margaret. "Can I send for Mrs. Martin to go over my dresses?"

"Again, Janey? She was here only last week and made thee that brown velvet."

"I did not say I wanted her to make anything. Just to look over what I have."

"Thee never lets her go without bespeaking some new fancy. And I think thee has clothes enough."

"*Thee* thinks?" Janey sneered a little. "Thee means Papa thinks. He is angry every time he sees a new ribbon. And it can hardly be the cost that worries him."

"Thee knows it is not, Janey. He is afraid of thy growing vain."

"Thy father is just the same with me," put in Sophia plaintively. "Not that I have any occasion for pretty dresses now."

Janey ignored her mother. "Can I have Mrs. Martin?" she persisted.

"Not this week, Janey. Hannah can do what thee wants. Thee might even do it thyself."

"Why should I?"

"For no special reason. Except that thee has really little else to do." Margaret, as if dismissing the subject, then spoke to Sophia, and Janey flounced angrily from the room.

She had, it is true, very little to do indeed, but she still did not propose to mend or renovate her own clothes. Why should she? Her father could well afford to dress her far more handsomely than he did. His stupid Quaker prejudices that spoiled everything prevented her from having a wardrobe suitable to a young lady. It was a shame! Janey went to her room and sat there sulkily at the window. She envied every one, even the pastrycook's boy with his tray and the woman calling lavender in the street below. She envied the whole world without knowing exactly what it was she wanted. Perhaps it was pretty clothes or invitations to balls and parties, perhaps a husband, perhaps only relief from dullness. But if Janey's

desires were uncertain her discontent was not. This was a concrete, all-possessing thing. Beyond writing in her diary and doing fancy work she had no occupation. Margaret allowed no interference at all in household matters; John Baron's circle included very few young people; her brothers brought none home. Nor were they in themselves companions for her—Charles had never pretended to like her, William John's nose was stuck everlastingly in a book. Religion depressed Janey; serious reading floored her. Her life was really very dull indeed.

Leaving the window, she went to her bed. She took from underneath the mattress a copy of *The Book of Beauty*, an annual which, on account of its frivolity and the notoriety of its editress, Lady Blessington, John Baron would never have permitted in the house. Janey, who had acquired her copy through the connivance of Hester, knew it by heart and as she turned the pages languidly, looking for the hundredth time at the pictures of fashionable beauties, her thoughts turned to Rose Clifford. She, like Margaret, had seen the paragraph announcing Mrs. Clifford's ball and she too, wondered about Charles. Was her brother really in love with Rose? Would he perhaps be seeing her on the sly? At the recollection of that moonlit embrace at Longdale Janey's pulses quickened. A faint excitement shook her. She smiled, feeling less discontented. She had thought of a way in which to disturb the monotony of life. She had not yet told her father what she had seen that night. And the prospect of doing this, of choosing some dull moment at which to spring the mine, of watching the result, amused her. It relieved the emptiness of her mind and gave her something to look forward to.

It was a pity from Janey's point of view that she had left her window. She missed by doing this the arrival of one of Mrs. Clifford's footmen who had come to deliver Charles's invitation to the ball. And it was as well, from Charles's point of view, that the door was opened by Thomas, who, on hearing from the Clifford's footman what the letter contained, had the forethought to slip it into his pocket.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Man of Fashion

ROSE's request that an invitation might be sent to Charles had been greeted with some derision by her mother.

"Invite young Baron?" Mary Clifford, drinking her morning coffee in bed, looked at Rose quizzically. "And do you imagine, love," she asked, "that his father will permit him to accept?"

"Charles is old enough surely to do as he chooses," Rose retorted sharply, displeased at this reference to her lover's lack of independence.

"Old enough perhaps," agreed her mother; "but does he? I think not, unless John Baron has altogether changed his tune. You have not a *tendresse* for that young man, have you, Rose?"

Rose took up a scent bottle from the toilet-table and examined it carefully before replying. "I like Charles very well, Mamma," she said at length. "Is there any reason why I should not?"

"No reason at all, child. A most respectable youth with a wealthy father into the bargain. But not for you, I fancy."

"As a matter of interest, Mamma, why not?"

Mrs. Clifford smiled slightly at the loftiness of Rose's tone. "As a matter of interest, my dear, your world and Charles's do not meet. Can you picture yourself living happily in Quaker surroundings? Now, don't protest. I was brought up among such people and I know."

"But Charles does not——"

"Yes, yes. I know what you are going to say. Charles does not conform. He means to break away."

"Well, so he does."

"I applaud his intention. But you, my dearest girl, have forgotten something."

"What is that, Mamma?"

"John Baron holds the purse strings. He would never countenance a marriage between you and Charles. Or between Charles and any girl who was not a Friend."

"Mamma!" Rose exclaimed virtuously. "Did I speak of marriage?"

"No, love, you did not. But I know how easily this romantic boy and girl love can grow. And Charles no doubt is quite a handsome fellow. You know the Quaker peculiarities, however. We are not Friends. And in this case, believe me, defiance would spell poverty."

"*We* are not poor, Mamma."

"God forbid, child, that we ever should be. But I do not propose to help you support a husband. And there is something else. Charles Baron is too young by far to make you happy. You need an older man for that, my Rose. A man of the world, preferably."

"I suppose you mean Harry Tempest."

"Why, yes, I do mean Sir Harry. Have you any objection to him?"

"N-no, Mamma."

"As he is four-and-thirty, you doubtless regard him as senile. But that is a kind of folly you will soon outgrow. He is the very man for you, Rose. He has an old title, money, a fashionable appearance and the *entrée* everywhere. Can you ask more?"

"I thought one was supposed to love one's husband, Mamma?"

"As to that——" Mrs. Clifford paused. Although glad enough at the time to marry her own husband, she had not loved him; and he had proved a disappointment afterwards, being quite out of sympathy with his wife's desire to figure in smart society. However, since the departed Mr. Clifford had left her so well provided for, there was small reason now for his

widow to regret her choice. And with regard to Rose, her mother felt it unwise to seem too cynical; the girl must be guided towards Sir Harry with tact and care.

So Mary Clifford, changing her tone, said gently, "My darling child, love is of course important. Whoever suggested it was not? But, between two people such as yourself and Harry Tempest, tender feelings will grow. You must take my word for that, Rose. He loves you already and being older, and more experienced, will soon teach you how to love him."

"I am sure," replied Rose demurely, "that you are right in calling him experienced. From all I hear——"

"Rose!" interrupted her mother. "That is indelicate! All men, worth calling men, sow their wild oats. It is only natural and proper that they should. But don't distress yourself, child. I have no wish to drive you into matrimony. As to Charles Baron, invite him here if you choose to. But he may disappoint you."

"He will not! Why should he?"

"Pray don't flare up so. I merely meant that most Dissenters lack polish. Charles may seem by contrast more attractive at Longdale than among our own friends here in London."

"I don't think he will disgrace us, Mamma," Rose answered coolly.

And the invitation was sent.

Later that day, Sir Harry Tempest called at Hertford Street. The baronet's age, as Mrs. Clifford had stated, was thirty-four, and although not handsome, he dressed in such slavish imitation of the renowned Count d'Orsay, that his sartorial splendour atoned somewhat for a lack of personal beauty. To look from Sir Harry's long, rather vacant face to his dandy's attire one would have thought his whole heart lay in his wardrobe; as, almost entirely, it did; but there remained unattached one tiny fragment, which had now been lost irrevocably to Rose Clifford. Sir Harry, moreover, wished to be married. He wanted, by way of variety, some legitimate

love-making; a pretty woman to grace his table, a son to carry on his name.

To suggest that Harry Tempest's heart, or that small portion of it, swayed his judgment, would be far from just; had he fallen in love unsuitably, he would, if the lady were virtuous, have fled from her, if the reverse, have taken without ceremony what he desired. But Rose was not unsuitable. Her father may have been the mere younger son of a not very distinguished peer; her mother, definitely middle-class, might have Dissent in her blood, combined with an absurd tendency to refute this fact by frivolous talk and an apparent leaning towards flashy society. But Sir Harry, shrewd enough to guess what inherent virtue lay behind Mrs. Clifford's foolish chatter, also guessed the broadmindedness she chose to display to be skin deep. She would always, he believed, drop any questionable acquaintance, unless that person also happened to be the fashion—a point of view in which Sir Harry himself concurred. To be brief, and taking into consideration Rose's quite solid fortune, he found the prospect of the match acceptable and was pleased rather than otherwise to be the social superior of his chosen wife.

"And where," he asked Mrs. Clifford, when her gossip began to tire him, "is the enchanting Miss Rose?"

"She is resting. The child seemed so fatigued this morning that I insisted upon her lying down. We have an engagement to-night as usual, and I cannot allow her to fag too much before our ball."

"Ah, yes, the ball." Sir Harry played with his gloves. He no more believed Rose to be tired than he had believed her sudden arrival last August at a country house where he and her mother chanced to meet, to have been unarranged for. He had felt on the contrary, and with perfect reason, that Rose had been expressly summoned there on his account; but, he did not, since he and Mrs. Clifford shared the same objective, resent her wiles in the least. In fact, her refusal now to let him see Rose, increased, as she had meant it to, his ardour.

"Ah, yes," he repeated, "the ball. I confess I am looking forward greatly to that."

"So are we all. Dear Rose can think or talk of nothing else. And hardly a single invitation has been refused. I had wondered, dear Sir Harry——" Here Mrs. Clifford hesitated, before resuming in a most insinuating manner, "I had wondered if—that is, since you are so well acquainted with Count d'Orsay—if you could perhaps persuade him to attend my ball?"

Sir Harry concealed a grin. D'Orsay's reputation ever since his scandalous marriage to, and separation from, the late Lord Blessington's daughter, was such as to bar him from all decorous drawing-rooms. Yet how some women did lion hunt! How eagerly would they pursue notoriety in order to be *à la mode*! And, to a certain extent Tempest agreed with them—the lack of morals, in a man, gave him a *cachet*. But, while disposed to humour Mrs. Clifford's whim, he was disposed also to make a favour of doing so.

"Count d'Orsay," he replied with some relish, "would as soon—nay sooner—attend a children's party."

"Oh," said Mrs. Clifford flatly.

"But I will mention it to him none the less." Harry Tempest did not wish to offend the woman he hoped to make his mother-in-law, and there would be time enough after his marriage to discourage her silly notions. If he waived a certain matter of three hundred pounds owed to him by Count d'Orsay, the exquisite Frenchman might agree to favour the ball. D'Orsay was in constant trouble over money, although, as Sir Harry enviously reflected, the Count still contrived, on credit, to dress far better than he himself, who ran no bills beyond the limits of prudence and his tradesmen's endurance.

"How kind you are!" said Mrs. Clifford, and added with a simper, "I have seen Count d'Orsay, of course. Only yesterday I watched him driving in the park. Such a magnificent creature. I long to know him!"

"Why?" Harry asked her with a certain malice.

"It's natural, surely, to desire acquaintance with distinguished persons. And Count d'Orsay is distinguished, is he not? Although a sad roué, no doubt, poor fellow."

Harry Tempest, smiling, said nothing. And Mrs. Clifford, who adored scandal, went on. "I suppose the Count still attaches himself to that shameless Blessington woman. Some one should really save him from her clutches."

"I can assure you, madam, Count d'Orsay has no desire to be saved, as you call it. He would be *desolé* without her ladyship." And then the baronet yawned. The d'Orsay-Blessington scandal was by no means new—a dozen more spicy ones had superseded it—and only those persons who, like Mrs. Clifford had failed to reach the highest degree of the *ton*, still troubled to discuss such ancient history.

"And so," he added, anxious to change the subject, "you will not permit me a glimpse of Miss Rose at all this afternoon?"

"No, indeed. She must rest. But she will scold me sadly when she hears you have called."

"You think so?" Tempest's affected voice grew eager. "You really think she will regret having missed me?"

"My dear man! How can you doubt it? You surely know by now with what warmth Rose regards you."

"I know nothing of the kind, madam. I suspect it diverts Miss Rose to tantalise her admirers. And I——"

"Well, Sir Harry?"

"I—I had intended, with your approval of course, to put a question to her. You understand my meaning?"

Mrs. Clifford, understanding very well, was not so foolish as to pretend the contrary. "I do not think," she advised Tempest, "that I should put that question to Rose to-day."

"Why not? I have waited long enough in all conscience."

"Then wait a little longer. Why not ask her on the night of our ball?"

"But that is so far ahead. A whole week!" Sir Harry spoke fretfully, like a thwarted child.

"The occasion should suit your purpose admirably. What puts a girl in such sweet humour as to be the hostess at her own ball?"

"Oh, she will be queen of revels, no doubt. But how will that serve me?"

"I'll see to it that it does," vowed Mrs. Clifford, but not out loud. She must avoid at all costs the rôle of a scheming, over-anxious mother. Sir Harry's vanity, of which she guessed him to possess a surfeit, would suffer if his betrothal owed too much to outside interference. He must believe his own charms capable of sweeping Rose off her feet; and so, thought Mrs. Clifford, they would be, strengthened by his income, his social position and the fact that so many ambitious mothers had angled for him in vain. The ball should provide a lucky moment for his proposal, since Rose, aware by then of Charles's half-baked awkwardness in such surroundings, would regard the more favourably Tempest's superior *savoir-faire* and breeding. The Baron money was plentiful enough, but how dull, how commonplace, how almost laughable, would such a connection be. And, besides, as Mary Clifford knew, John Baron would never allow it.

"Wait until the ball," she said, and smiled her very sweetest upon Sir Harry.

Charles's efforts to cut a really dashing figure at the Cliffords' ball might have touched Rose a little and would most certainly have amused her mother. After Rose's departure from Longdale, he had taken great pains there with his dancing, and felt himself, in this respect, already less deficient—Rose would no longer be able to laugh at him for moving out of turn. But, afraid that nervousness might diminish improvement, Charles was determined to balance all possible clumsiness by an extreme impeccability of dress, and he hoped, this once achieved, to maintain his dignity and convey if necessary the impression that dancing was a bagatelle beneath his well-clad notice. Charles, by no means blind to the

advantages of his face and figure, was confident, given the money, of obtaining this happy result. But the money presented a problem.

There was, in the first place, no hope whatever that any suit already in his wardrobe would do; made undoubtedly of excellent material, they all lacked style and were unsuitable for wear in a Mayfair ballroom. He must have a new one. A suit, not sponsored by the family tailor, but one of his own selection; a suit that would mark his emancipation from dowdiness and glorify his first appearance as a man of fashion.

Owing to his father's belief that, for a youth living at home, there could be but few legitimate expenses, Charles possessed very little money. The amount paid to him by the Bank was small; John Baron, mistrusting his younger son's fondness for pleasure, added nothing to his salary, and although he contrived by this method to check all frivolous expenditure on the part of Charles, the young man's desire for independence grew in proportion to such strict supervision.

Up till now, whenever in need of an extra sum to spend, Charles had turned naturally to his step-sister, whose little fortune remained almost untouched; beyond satisfying the claims of certain pensioners, Margaret spent very little and she derived great pleasure from indulging the fancies of her favourite brother. To Margaret, accordingly, but this time a little doubtfully, Charles went.

"Peg," he ventured; "could thee spare some money for a fellow?"

"Do I know this fellow?" asked Margaret, smiling.

"All too well! I'm afraid he's an insatiable fellow."

"Indeed? And his name?"

"Begins with C."

"C? That's strange. Could it by any chance be Charles?"

"Not only could be, ma'm, but is."

"And how much does this fellow—does Charles require?"

"He—I—that is—could thee manage about twelve pounds or so?"

Assailed by a sudden suspicion, Margaret said coldly, "Twelve pounds is a good deal of money, Charles. What is it for?"

Charles flushed. As a rule he did not take more from Margaret than a pound or so, and only the urgent importance of the present occasion had induced him to ask for so much larger a sum.

"I know it's a good deal," he admitted awkwardly. "But I will repay thee, Peg. That is, if thee does not mind waiting. I'll save a little every week and give——"

"Oh, Charles!" Margaret stopped him. "Thee should know that I care nothing about repayment. I will gladly give thee the money, not lend it. But what is it for?"

"If thee must know," Charles answered, slightly on the defensive, "it's for a suit of clothes."

"Clothes? But thee has plenty."

"And what clothes! Does thee think it is pleasant for me to cut a figure of fun?"

"A figure of fun *where*?" Margaret's voice hardened; she was positive now that Charles had been invited to the Cliffords' ball and meant to go there.

Charles, sensing from her voice and expression that something was wrong, decided against candour. "Anywhere," he replied to her question. "But let's forget it. I can do without the money."

"Oh, but, Charles," Margaret spoke eagerly, anxious not to estrange him, "I want to help thee. Thee knows that I don't grudge the money. But I—I only wondered whether thee had some special reason for buying these new clothes."

Charles resented her curiosity the more, because he was acute enough to guess what caused it. While he did not know how Margaret could have found out about the ball—she never pried like Janey—he was sure she had read some connection between his wish for a new suit and Rose. So he resolved not to press the matter further. Margaret's affection, sweet though he often found it, formed, with his father's tyranny, yet

another chain that bound him to his home, his humdrum duty, and that held him back from making his own life and winning the wife he wanted. He was tired of all bonds, whether of discipline or love. He could, or so he thought just then, dispense even with Margaret's loyalty for the sake of freedom.

"Let's talk no more about it, Peg," he said. "I can do well enough for the present with what I have. In the spring perhaps I'll coax thee for a new outfit."

"Let me think it over," Margaret begged; for, although still bent on frustrating if possible any plan that might concern Rose, she could not disappoint Charles easily and might, had he continued to urge her, have given him the twelve pounds after all.

But Charles would not reopen the discussion; after talking for a while of other matters, he went in search of William John and asked him for the money.

"It's a mean trick to rob thee," he said, a little ashamed. "Thee has not overmuch thyself, I know."

"That's all right. I'd like to lend thee the money," replied William John who was, if not opulent, better off than Charles, for John Baron gave his docile elder son a fairly liberal allowance.

Charles was not only grateful for the promptitude with which his request was granted; he was impressed most favourably by William John's discretion. The money no sooner asked for, was promised, without the preliminary of a single inconvenient question, and Charles's already sincere affection for his brother increased. Margaret, could she have overheard their conversation, might have learned a useful lesson.

Under some circumstances, Charles would have rewarded so admirable an absence of curiosity by revealing his secret to William John and he refrained from doing so only for his brother's own sake. It would be better, in the event of discovery, Charles reflected, that no one should have known beforehand about his projected visit to the ball. So he contented himself by

calling his brother a "thundering good fellow," not once, but many times.

William John, however, while unaware of the facts, had guessed that Charles needed the money for some most particular reason, a reason moreover, which he preferred to keep from Margaret. And this deduction led quite naturally to Rose. William John sighed. Charles's inclination promised no happiness and must lead sooner or later to a stormy scene with his father. Or worse. But, knowing all protest to be useless, William John held his peace; still frail in body, he had grown correspondingly stronger in mind and could view most things that happened with an intelligent philosophy, which while he loved Charles, enabled him to leave his brother alone. He knew that Charles must follow his own road and, far from disapproving, admired his reckless spirit. Life held out small promise of adventure for William John.

Charles, having secured the necessary sum of money with which to buy his suit, next set himself to find a sufficiently fashionable tailor, or rather, knowing very little of such matters, he set Thomas to find one for him. The footman, who had many acquaintances among gentlemen's servants, agreed promptly to make some inquiries and was able, twenty-four hours later, to slip into Charles's hand a grimy piece of paper on which the following legend had been laboriously inscribed—"Whisk and Verity, 85 Sackville Street, is well spoke of by Mister the hon. George Wing's man."

Charles, when he received this useful information, was on the point of leaving home for the city; he made all haste after banking hours to Sackville Street, discovering when he reached the correct number, that the tailors in question—Messrs. Whisk and Verity—maintained there a discreetly elegant establishment. The street door stood open, and Charles entered first the passage, then the shop that gave off from it, although shop is perhaps too vulgar a word to use in describing what was virtually a parlour. A bright fire burned on the hearth, some chairs were drawn up to this for the comfort of customers

and a fine engraving of King George IV., most appropriately, hung over the mantel. Only by a few rolls of cloth, shyly displayed, did Messrs. Whisk and Verity reveal the nature of their business.

A young assistant dressed in neat black greeted Charles sadly. The hour was growing late, and the young man, who had a sweetheart, had been eagerly awaiting an order to close up the shop.

"What is your pleasure, sir?" he asked gloomily.

This seemed so inane a question that Charles restrained an impulse to demand a pound of tea; instead, he merely stated his requirements. The youth stifled a sigh, requested him to wait and went through a door at the back of the shop in search of his employers.

They did not come at once, preferring no doubt to allow time for the dignity of their premises to impress the customer, who they had been advised by the assistant was a new one; but, after some minutes had elapsed, a tall, sallow man, Mr. Verity, and a short chubby man, Mr. Whisk, entered the shop together and advanced in majestic single file upon Charles.

"Good-evening to you, sir," said Verity, whose voice was loud and imposing.

"Sir, good-evening," said Whisk, whose voice was low and throaty.

"Good-evening," said Charles, and his own voice sounded nervous.

There was a pause, which Messrs. Whisk and Verity employed, or so it seemed, in eyeing disparagingly the suit Charles wore, and he finally broke the silence himself by saying, "I was recommended here by one of your customers. Mr. George Wing."

If Charles had hoped by this speech to establish his claim to some deference the effect was hardly what he intended. Verity looked more loftily blank than ever, whilst Whisk, without perceptible enthusiasm, merely repeated, "Mr. Wing? Yes, to be sure, Mr. George Wing. Quite, quite." The truth

being that the young gentleman in question had out-distanced the bounds of even a tailor's capacity for extending credit.

Verity, apparently the stronger character of the two partners, then said, "We know Mr. Wing, sir, certainly. We—er—know him well. But we don't, I think, know *you*, sir."

At this Charles felt both abashed and puzzled, having yet to learn that the choice by fashionable tailors of their patrons somewhat resembles in its fastidiousness the election of members to a club.

"My name is Baron," he stated, blushing.

"Baron, sir?" Verity's manner softened.

"*The* Baron?" inquired Whisk smoothly.

"I don't know what thee means by *the* Baron," Charles, half-vexed and half-diverted, replied. "My father is John Baron."

"Of Lombard Street?" prompted Verity.

"And Bryanston Square?" supplemented Whisk.

As Charles assented, the partners beamed on him so blandly that his spirits perceptibly rose. It mattered little then to have revealed himself a Quaker since his father's name produced so gratifying an effect.

"And now, sir," asked Verity almost gaily, "what *are* your exact requirements?"

Charles explained.

"Quite, sir," Verity still smiled. "An evening suit, you say. But is that all you require, sir?"

"Yes; I thank you. That is all for the present."

Verity sighed, his eye on the cut of Charles's coat, but he said with calm resignation, "Ah, well, another time, sir, no doubt. Now as to this evening suit, Mr. Baron. Shall it be made with knee breeches?"

"Why, yes, certainly. I think so."

"Or with pantaloons?"

"Well—er—yes, no doubt pantaloons would be better."

"Or with trousers?"

Charles gaped in confusion, then betrayed his innocence by

asking Verity which of these alternatives he personally considered the best.

"Well, sir," replied the tailor, "since you defer to me, I should advise you——"

"There is no question really," chipped in Whisk.

"That knee breeches——" This from Verity.

"And pantaloons——" Whisk this time.

"Is out of date," concluded Verity in triumph.

"Indeed," said Charles, "is that so?"

"Oh, they're *worn*, sir," explained Verity with much condescension, "and will be for some years to come, no doubt about it. But trousers for evening wear, if you take my meaning, Mr. Baron, is a thing not only of the present but of the future too."

"The far future," added Whisk, a dreamy, clairvoyant expression in his eyes.

"Well, in that case," said Charles, impressed, "let me by all means have trousers."

"I knew at once you were a gentleman of taste, sir," Verity declared warmly.

"And the material," asked Charles, much encouraged. "What material does thee suggest?"

There was a stunned silence. Verity regarded Charles with consternation, Whisk with sorrow, and it was the chubby partner who said at last, speaking in accents of pity, "There is only *one* material for *evening* wear, Mr. Baron."

Charles, much mortified, said nothing.

"Alfred," Verity called out loudly. "The Superfine."

The youth appeared, shot a sad look at Charles, but obeyed his master swiftly, when Verity ordered him to display the material, a supply of which lay so near at hand, that Alfred's assistance, or so Charles thought, seemed hardly necessary. But Verity waited in solemn silence while his underling proffered him the roll of cloth much as an archbishop delivers the sceptre to his sovereign. Then, while Whisk stood admiringly by, Verity laid the roll upon the mahogany table,

moistened his thumb and forefinger and flicked out a few yards of the smoothly-faced, black material.

"The best quality obtainable, sir," he said to Charles, who, looking as knowing as possible, murmured, "Excellent. Very good. The very thing, I'm sure."

"The *only* thing, sir," Verity corrected. "And for the vest?" he added.

"Black satin," suggested Whisk.

"Aye," agreed Charles hastily; "black satin will be capital."

But Verity shook his head. "If I might make so bold, sir, not black satin. You are young, Mr. Baron. Such a quantity of black might seem sombre. Now, my suggestion is white. We have a special line in Marseilles quilting. Will you be guided by me?"

"Yes, indeed. Certainly."

"Then we will use the quilting. Do you, Alfred, go and look it out. We'll follow a simple design, Whisk, I think. Mr. Baron has the figure for it."

"A rolling collar, perhaps. And no stop," was Whisk's contribution.

"I'm not with you there," said Verity. "Now, *I* lean to a stop and no collar. That will be best."

Whisk, a little hurt perhaps at having his opinion set aside and possessing a more romantic and adventurous temper than his partner, offered a further suggestion. "We might," he ventured, "experiment with the new fashion of cutting away a trifle at the bottom so that the points do not meet."

"We might do no such thing," retorted Verity in a voice of thunder. "That is a new *fad* not a new *fashion*. A vulgar, foppish frivolity is what I call it. Persons who could cut a vest so must be devoid of taste altogether. Devoid of it! Such snipping is all of a piece with making vests and waistcoats out of flowered silks and velvets and such-like."

While Whisk looked downcast, Charles felt relieved, because, disappointed with the plainness of the Marseilles quilting which had been brought in unobtrusively by Alfred, he had

already considered the advisability of bespeaking some gayer fabric for his vest. And he was glad now not to have incurred the force of Mr. Verity's censure.

The subject was not dropped, however, for Whisk, as if to justify himself, remarked that many gentlemen did select a patterned or light-coloured material for their vests, the famous arbiter of fashion, Count d'Orsay, among them.

"Count d'Orsay," pronounced Verity, looking superior, "is a law to himself. But among the persons who copy him many are *not* gentlemen. And not only that, Whisk, mark you—the d'Orsay vogue is dying. Stands to reason it must be, with the demand there is now for dark suitings as opposed to light."

"Well, well," Whisk admitted sadly, "no doubt that is so. Should we not take Mr. Baron's measurements now?"

Verity, who liked nothing better than to expatiate upon the laws of fashion, agreed with some reluctance to do this; for being accustomed to arrogant customers, who scolded and quibbled, or alternatively poked fun at his pomposity, the tailor had enjoyed awing Charles by an exhibition of omniscience. The measurements were taken, however, and the hour fixed for a fitting and still, to Charles's dismay, no mention had been made at all of price. He was growing doubtful whether a coat of black superfine with long tight trousers to match it and the *two* vests of Marseilles quilting, which he was assured were essential, could all be purchased for the once lordly-sounding sum of twelve pounds. But to inquire the cost of this resplendent outfit seemed altogether too steep a descent from the sublime to the sordid.

It was not indeed until the partners were preparing to bow him off the premises, and Alfred was waiting impatiently to put up the shutters, that Charles summoned his failing courage. He then inquired, timidly enough, whether Mr. Verity and Mr. Whisk desired to be paid then or upon the completion of his order.

"Paid, sir?" gasped Verity almost faintly.

"Paid, Mr. Baron?" repeated Whisk aghast.

"Why, yes." Charles, with a great lack of refinement, put his hand to his pocket.

"But, sir," Verity protested, then paused, seeming unable to put into words the fact that their terms were not, and never would be, cash.

Charles, aware by this time of his blunder, and looking from one partner to the other, said quickly, "You would prefer then to send in your bill?"

"At the quarter, sir," Whisk told him reproachfully.

"To your father's son, Mr. Baron," interposed Verity, "at the half-year."

Charles bowed, and being by now quite exhausted by the demands of the interview, made his escape, chuckling on his way home to think he had obtained a "tick" at so stylish a tailor's, not on a man-about-town's recommendation but by the magic of the austere name of John Baron.

The question of his suit settled and two fine evening shirts bespoke, Charles was then free to turn his attention to some of the other problems which lay before him. Although fully equipped now to shine at the Cliffords' ball, he had yet to arrange how to attend this function undetected. John Baron, who allowed none of his children the freedom of a latch-key, was in the habit at nine o'clock every evening of reading prayers to the assembled household, and, this duty performed, would retire alone to his study, thus rendering it possible for those who wished to do so to leave the house without his knowledge. But to re-enter it was a different matter, for the front door was locked, barred and bolted each night by Farren, who guarded the key like an ogre, and who secured the back door also.

Charles, in his perplexity, felt obliged to appeal to Thomas, which, however, he did with reluctance, fearing that in the event of discovery the man might be involved in grave trouble. But Thomas, with no thought of himself, rose eagerly to the occasion. It would be perfectly simple, he said, for him to slip down late at night, and so loosen the catch of the kitchen

window that Charles could open this and climb in through it. He agreed also to fetch the completed suit of clothes from Whisk and Verity's, to stand guard while it was put on and to act as a kind of scout while Charles was leaving the house.

The final service that Charles demanded of Thomas proved in the footman's opinion the hardest of all. He was quite shocked indeed when requested to watch the speech of his young master and to check, whenever possible, its Quaker peculiarities.

"But, Master Charles," he protested, "it ain't respectful."

"Never mind that. I want *you* to do it. I'm resolved to speak like a reasonable human being and not like a Quaker. Or she—I mean people will laugh at me. So do *you*, Thomas, whenever we are alone, jump down hard on the 'thees.' I don't want to say them, but they slip out at times from habit. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied Thomas doubtfully. "I hunderstand right enough. But it don't seem respectful."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Invitation to the Waltz

DIRECTLY Charles, who had been received at the head of the staircase by Mrs. Clifford, entered her ballroom, his peace of mind collapsed. The company were waltzing. He had in his excitement overlooked the fact that the familiar dances still finding favour at Longdale would be despised by an up-to-date London hostess as old-fashioned. He had never waltzed in his life.

From near the door, he watched the dancers whirl expertly past him, listened with wistful pleasure to the music's lilt and wondered greatly at the elegance of the women; used to the comparatively simple dresses of his sisters and cousins, Charles, on seeing such an array of fine silks and muslins, embroidered organdies, flowers, jewels and feathers, was utterly dazzled. Then he caught sight of Rose. In a fragile gown of white and green, an emerald sparkling on her bosom, a knot of white camellias in her curls, she was waltzing with effortless grace, clasped round the waist by a long-faced, supremely well-tailored partner.

She was adorably flushed or so Charles, who knew little about rouge, supposed; her eyes, shining with pleasure, looked far too often into her partner's. She seemed, indeed, to yield all too voluptuously to the pressure of the fellow's arm. Was it possible, Charles wondered, that she admired such a coxcomb?

His jealous conjectures were disturbed by Mrs. Clifford, who, rustling up behind him, tapped his arm with her fan. "Well, Charles," she asked brightly, "have you no one to dance with? You must let me find you a partner."

"No, thank you," he answered. "I cannot—that is, I do not care to dance."

"Not dance at a ball? Nonsense, my dear boy! You have surely not become the tired man-of-the-world already. Now be a dear, good creature and come with me."

Mary Clifford, her hand placed firmly on Charles's elbow, began to urge him in the direction of a sofa, upon which were seated three forlorn-looking girls.

Much averse from the prospect of consoling a wallflower, Charles hung back. He searched wildly for some excuse, but as he neither wished to admit his ignorance of the waltz, nor by attempting its mysteries to make an exhibition of himself, could find none. The predicament seeming hopeless, he had just nerved himself to face it, when the arrival of a belated and much coveted guest claimed Mrs. Clifford's attention. And leaving Charles where he stood, she made all haste to greet the newcomer who, with an air of faintly amused indulgence, surveyed the ballroom.

Charles, turning to look after his hostess, saw an extremely tall man, whose elegance surpassed the very peak of fashion, and whose dress, judged by the standards of Messrs. Verity and Whisk, was even *outré*. His age, difficult to guess, was perhaps over thirty; his graceful figure, as he leaned against the doorway, showed to its full advantage; his hair, a rich, dark chestnut, curled profusely, as did his beard, trimmed to leave the chin shaven. He had, for all his exquisite appearance, a healthy look, and a fresh clarity of complexion that was most appealing.

The clothes worn by this gentleman were such as Charles had never even dreamed of—a perfectly cut coat, deep blue in colour, and trousers of oyster grey, a tone repeated in his gloves and in a great satin cravat, among the folds of which glittered a diamond; the waistcoat, also of satin, displayed a second shade of blue—pure periwinkle—which harmonised most artfully with the coat and trousers.

Charles, as did many other guests, stared at the resplendent wearer of these clothes with startled admiration. Here, he thought excitedly, was the genuine article.

A dandy! It was, indeed, the very prince of them, Count Alfred d'Orsay.

The music ceased. Charles abandoned his scrutiny of the Count to look for Rose. He saw her approaching on her partner's arm and hurried forward to meet her.

"Charles! How glad I am to see you." Rose held out her hand, which he clasped eagerly; too eagerly, in fact, to please Sir Harry Tempest.

"May I not make this gentleman's acquaintance?" the baronet asked stiffly.

"But, of course. He is an old friend—Mr. Charles Baron, Charles, may I present you to Sir Harry Tempest." Rose enjoyed the small drama of this introduction.

Charles made a movement to shake hands; the baronet merely bowed. And once again, unconsciously, Count d'Orsay came to the rescue; stranded beside his hostess and tired of her already, he observed Harry Tempest and beckoned imperiously to the originator of his boredom.

"Rose," asked Charles softly as Tempest, with much reluctance, walked away, "are you really and truly glad to see me?"

"Dear Charles, you know I am. But you must not gaze at me so. People are looking."

"What if they are? You'll dance with me, won't you?" Charles, alarmed at his own daring, hoped there would be some quadrilles.

"Of course I will. But not until later. I am bespoke for so many dances ahead."

"Have you saved none for me? You knew I was coming."

"But I'm the hostess, you see. That makes it more difficult. You look very fine, Charles. How well you are dressed."

"Did you expect me to shame you?" he asked hotly.

"Oh, my dear, how quickly you take offence!" Rose, anxious not to wound him further, refrained from any comment on his studied avoidance of "thee," and merely warned him, "We

are making ourselves conspicuous by standing here. Mamma is watching."

"Promise me the next dance then." Charles grew reckless; even at the cost of bungling the waltz he was determined to stay near Rose. Only by doing this could he frustrate the intentions of Tempest.

"No, not the next," she told him. "You must wait a little."

"How many have you promised to that long-faced fellow?"

"A fair number," Rose replied airily.

The music started again. "Come and sit out with me." Charles spoke commandingly, gripping Rose's arm. "I want to talk to you. That's what I came for."

"My dear, please be more patient. I am engaged to dance this with Lord Derehaven. He is quite old and a pet of Mamma's. I must not offend him."

"Confound Lord Derehaven!"

"Such language! And from a Quaker! No, Charles, we must not go in there. Really, we mustn't."

As they talked, Charles had been making his way towards a little ante-chamber that opened off the ballroom. "Just for one minute," he pleaded, and they went inside.

"And now," he said triumphantly, "we will sit down and talk to each other quietly."

"We will do no such thing. Lord Derehaven will be looking for me."

"Let him!"

"Oh, Charles, be reasonable. This is my own ball and I must be civil to every one."

"You might begin by being civil to me," Charles said coolly. "Sit down now on this sofa and tell me all the things I want to know."

"And what are they?" Rose asked as she obeyed him.

"In the first place, do you still love me?"

"Didn't my letters tell you so?"

"In a way perhaps. But you wrote so few."

"I wrote as often as I could. I was very much occupied."

"With what? I mean with whom? That Tempest fellow?"

"Do you like my dress?" Rose asked, leaving the sofa and ignoring Charles's questions.

"Yes, yes. But, pray don't change the subject. I want to know if——"

"These sleeves are the latest from Paris. Aren't they delightful?"

And Rose, to show off her gown's perfection, revolved coquettishly before him. The billowing skirt of white tulle, worn over green, was trimmed with countless frills and adorned here and there by clusters of tiny pale-green leaves. All of which was undoubtedly pretty, and costly too, Charles felt sure. The sleeves, which Rose so gloried in, were shaped like epaulettes on the shoulder, and from these a cascade of delicate, green-edged flounces fell away, leaving the forearm bare. Rose wore green satin shoes with sparkling buckles, and by lifting her skirt a fraction revealed fine white silk stockings.

Charles, overcome by masculine bewilderment, watched her; he could tell the dress was beautiful, but possessed neither the knowledge nor the inclination to appraise it in detail. And as Rose moved this way and that, seeming with pretty affectation to display her charms, he suddenly grew angry. She was a doll, he told himself, a vain, heartless empty-headed doll. And yet so lovely. Charles, to his own confusion, both hated and desired her.

"Oh, stop that posing!" he cried out in exasperation.

Rose, in the act of sweeping him a curtsey, paused. "Why, Charles?" she asked. "What is the matter?"

"Can't you grasp that it's you and not the dress I care for? Why should I want to gape at frills and furbelows? And why won't you answer my question?"

"What question?" Rose looked innocent and puzzled.

"About that fellow, Tempest. What is there between you?"

"Oh, Charles, don't tease so. Sir Harry Tempest is a friend."

"Indeed? Then he must be a warm one. I saw the way he looked at you. And the way he held your waist too."

"Why not? He has to hold my waist when we are dancing. That is a rule of the waltz. But you know nothing of the world, my poor Charles. You're only a boy."

"Oh, am I?" Charles seized Rose by both her wrists and with a mature authority drew her to him. "I'll soon show you," he told her roughly, "whether I'm such a boy."

"Charles! Let go my hands. You're hurting them."

"I don't care if I am. I wish I could hurt more than your hands. I wish I could hurt your heart. If you have one! Oh, Rose, do you think of nothing but pleasure and fashion?"

"I——"

"Do you never think of me?" Charles pleaded. "Of loving me. Of what our life could be together." He drew her closer.

"Charles, don't. Pray, don't," Rose urged him; yet she did not resist. She could feel his heart now, could count the wild beat of it against her breast. She raised her eyes and let Charles read in them a softness, an abandon which seemed, in its contradiction of her former coquetry, magically appealing.

"Oh, Rose," he cried, "how I love you!" Then, as if to atone for his roughness, he released her hands.

But Rose stayed close beside him. "I love you too," she whispered; "please, dear Charles, believe me."

She exhaled a fragrance, a faint odour of violets, and Charles longed to embrace her. He longed to kiss her lips, to feel her yield to him again. But he did not do this. Instead, with a quiet and almost manly gravity, he asked her, "Then since you love me, Rose, why need we so misunderstand each other?"

"Oh, if that were all," she answered impatiently, her mood changing already.

"But it is all, surely? What else can matter?" Charles was perplexed, not knowing that the embrace he had not ventured had been Rose's exact objective.

She turned away from him and exclaimed pettishly, "Ah,

you don't understand me. I don't know rightly whether I understand myself. But I do know I'm a wretch."

"You're not!"

"Oh, yes, I am. I love you and I want you to love me. I—I even like you to kiss me. Only——"

"Only what, Rose?"

"Only, I care so very much for other things as well—things that perhaps I should not care for."

"What, for instance?"

"I hardly like to mention them. They seem so trivial."

"One of these things," said Charles, "is money. But that isn't trivial, Rose. I see now that it's important. And I mean to make it for thee—for you, my love. If you will only be patient."

"But money is not all. I care so much for dress and gaiety and going into the world and—well—and flattery," Rose admitted.

"And do you think," Charles asked her, "that I can give you none of these things?"

Rose made a little movement of her hands, gracefully helpless. "Well," she demanded, "can you?"

"I not only can but I will," Charles declared eagerly. "Oh, Rose, you might surely trust me. Do you think I mean to stay always as I am—a mere clerk in Papa's bank? Do you think I shall never achieve anything better? Nor make my way, nor——"

"Dear Charles," Rose checked him. "I am sure, quite sure, that you will do well. I believe that, of course. But——"

"Well, Rose?"

"I'm weak," she confessed to him with a kind of desperate honesty. "I can't bear to wait for what I want. I love you, Charles, and if we could marry now, if you had money, if there would be no fuss or disapproval—if—oh, don't you, can't you understand?"

"I think so. You mean that since we cannot marry now, since I have no money of my own, and since there *would* be

fuss and disapproval, you cannot wait. You mean that I am not worth it."

At the tone of his voice, wounded and cold, Rose relented quickly. "No, Charles, I mean no such thing. I will wait, my dear. Indeed I'll try to——"

Before Rose could protest further, her mother appeared in the doorway. Mary Clifford was smiling, but not with her eyes, which were alert and unsympathetic.

"Rose, love," she said sweetly, "poor Lord Derehaven is waiting for his dance. Did you forget him?"

"No, Mamma—I mean yes, I'm afraid that I did."

"Then go to him quickly, child. I dare say he will forgive you. And you must spare him another later on."

"Yes, Mamma," said Rose meekly and went.

Mrs. Clifford, still smiling, turned to Charles. "As for you, you deserter, come with me at once. I have a lady here languishing positively for a partner."

Charles, not daring to protest, followed his hostess to the ballroom, to be confronted by a young woman whose dress was fashionable but whose face was plain. The introduction made, Mrs. Clifford, feeling well pleased with her manoeuvre, walked away. The young lady waited expectantly.

The musicians were playing one of the new Strauss waltzes, and the charm of this melody revived Charles's courage. Nothing so pretty could be difficult to follow. He placed his arm a little stiffly round his partner's waist and edged her towards the dancers. His sense of rhythm being good, the subsequent performance was less ludicrous than it might otherwise have been. But it was ludicrous enough.

"This is a waltz, you know," the lady a trifle acidly reminded Charles when they had made an awkward turn or two together.

"Yes, I know," he answered, treading on her foot.

"Pray be more careful!" she reproved him; and while he struggled valiantly to get back into step, she maintained a frosty silence.

"We had better not attempt the reverse, I think," she did, at length, remark.

"By no means." Charles, having no notion what the "reverse" meant, was the more anxious not to try it.

He continued grimly to steer his disillusioned partner round the room, counting the time under his breath, and watching, for instruction, the other dancers. This proved an unfortunate resource, however, for Charles, his attention elsewhere, cannoned violently into several couples, Lord Derehaven and Rose among them.

"I beg your pardon," he muttered.

His lordship bowed affably enough, and Rose smiled, but Charles, as they danced away, caught the word "clumsy" and fancied that Rose, looking over Lord Derehaven's shoulder, mocked him. He stepped again, this time more heavily, on to his partner's foot.

"Ow!" At this indignant exclamation, several people tittered.

"Do, pray, let us sit down," urged the lady crossly. "You should have warned me that you could not dance."

Charles thought it no wonder that so disagreeable a person had been a wallflower, but he continued, as he led her to a sofa, to apologise. "I trust I have not hurt thy foot too badly," he said.

His partner stared. "What a strange way to talk. Like a Quaker."

"I am a Quaker."

"Oh! That accounts for it."

Charles was so angry that he turned and left her. That accounts for it indeed! As if a Quaker were some strange and uncouth animal. How dared so plain a girl be so impertinent? He wished now that he had trodden on her foot much harder.

Leaving the ballroom, he went downstairs. There was really nothing to stay for. His talk with Rose had been interrupted, she had seen him make a spectacle of himself, and Mrs. Clifford would contrive somehow to prevent their being once

more alone together. Charles wished he had never come. His careful plans, his fine new suit, had all been wasted. He was no nearer settling matters with Rose; in fact, having cut so poor a figure before her, farther away from an understanding than ever. How could he alter himself and become a man of the world? He was frustrated in all directions—by lack of money, by an unreasonable father, by the snobbery of Mrs. Clifford and by, he suspected, the wavering of Rose herself. What was there between her and that Tempest fellow? And how could he, Charles, compete with so fashionable a rival?

He must at all costs change himself. He must become a personage. A man who could walk into the Cliffords', or any other ballroom, with the sublime indifference of conscious superiority. But how did one do this? Charles thought longingly of the handsome guest whom Mrs. Clifford had hastened so effusively to greet. There was a personage! A man so superb, so magnificently self-assured, that no possible situation could ever discompose him.

Too preoccupied to notice what he was doing, Charles collided at the door of the cloakroom with a gentleman who was coming out.

"I beg your pardon, sir." As he started his apology, Charles was aware suddenly of addressing the very man whom he had envied and who had now swung about his broad shoulders a dark-blue cloak lined richly with periwinkle coloured satin.

"*De rien*," answered Count d'Orsay, smiling. Charles's face, handsome and troubled, pleased him. "You are leaving?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yes. I must—I mean, I am."

"It is so ver' early," said the Count. "And ze ladies are so ver' pretty. Why do you go?"

"I don't think they're so pretty," Charles replied. And then, longing to confide in some one and attracted by d'Orsay's manner, he confessed frankly, "You see, sir, I cannot waltz."

"Oho, so zat is it?" D'Orsay laughed, showing fine white teeth, that were set a little widely apart. "*Mon pauvre ami!*

Zat is indeed too bad. But why then do you come to a ball?"

Seeing Charles blush, the Count did not wait for an answer. "I can guess zat you came to see one special lady. And she perhaps make fun of you, hein?"

Charles nodded. Rose *had* mocked him. He was sure of it.

"Poor boy!" went on Count d'Orsay. "She should have shown more heart. But as to waltzing—one can learn."

"I mean to," Charles said firmly.

The Count regarded him with some interest. A nice boy this, apparently most unhappy, and all because some silly girl had scorned his inability to dance. As if it mattered! With such a figure and appearance, this youth, waltzing or not, should conquer many hearts. His suit lacked *chic*, of course, but that could be remedied—a clothes sense would indeed serve the young man better than a thousand dancing lessons, for to be superbly dressed rated far higher in the world of fashion than any trivial accomplishment. A kindly impulse, combined with a desire for distraction, prompted the Count to say, "I, too, am leaving, as you see. Not because I cannot waltz but because—*tout court—je m'ennuie*. Ze friend who enticed me here is intent upon conquering a lady. So—I go. Shall we leave together?"

"I—er—yes, indeed, sir. I should be very glad to." Charles made as if to follow the Count at once.

"You have a hat? A cloak? I think you were on your way to find them." D'Orsay seemed amused and Charles, blushing again, went to retrieve his belongings.

"Ah, zat is better," said the Frenchman on his return. "And now—*on s'amuse*. My name is d'Orsay. May I know yours?"

D'Orsay! Charles, who had heard vague, garbled stories of the Count's fantastic elegance and wild exploits at the gaming-table, was staggered. He gaped at his new acquaintance. Then, recovering his manners, he stated his own name.

"Charles Baron?" repeated d'Orsay. "Well, Monsieur Charles Baron, ze night is still young. Where shall we go?"

They were standing now upon the front doorsteps, while a footman summoned d'Orsay's carriage.

"I—I don't know," Charles answered shyly.

The Count considered; he had intended originally to look in at Crockford's, but now, having taken charge of Charles, he changed his mind. A furious gambler himself, it was not in d'Orsay's cultivated nature to find amusement in perverting others. The boy was a nice boy, so why instruct him in the art of ruining himself? He might perhaps take Charles to Lady Blessington's. Yet this would not do either. She would be kind, of course, she was to every one, but the company in her library might be a trifle heavy. This young man, humiliated by his failure in the ballroom, needed above all things to regain his self-conceit. And he would hardly do that among the political and literary habitués of Gore House. No, they would not visit Lady Blessington to-night. A better idea occurred to d'Orsay, who, having instructed his coachman accordingly, took his place beside Charles in the luxurious carriage.

"We go," he announced cheerfully, "to see a ver' charming lady. We go to ze Olympic Theatre to call on Madame Vestris."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Re-enter Madame

CHARLES was too staggered by d'Orsay's announcement to take more than a perfunctory part in the conversation with which the Count whiled away the distance between Mayfair and Wych Street. He could hardly believe his good fortune. To see Madame Vestris again and to see her so easily, under such splendid patronage—this must be Fate!

D'Orsay, quite undisturbed by his companion's brief answers, chatted pleasantly, speaking in warm terms of Vestris and her career at the Olympic; of how brilliantly she had achieved her ambition by making the little theatre fashionable at last, a haunt not only of the *ton*, but of wits also, politicians and men of letters. He spoke of Liston, the great comedian, who, in the preceding year had played his farewell performance upon the stage of the Olympic, and of his own friend, Charles James Mathews, son of a famous father, who was now a popular member of Madame's company. He enlarged, too, on the supreme artistry of her productions, the costly scenery and dresses, the attention to detail, and the welcome abolition of clumsy old stage devices.

"She is a ver' clever woman," he said in conclusion. "Not only an actress but a *directrice* of rare quality. Your English theatre—it owes her much."

And Charles believed him.

On reaching their destination, they alighted from the carriage, and while d'Orsay stopped to give some directions to his coachman, Charles, with a beating heart, approached, for the second time, the stage door of the Olympic.

The doorkeeper, seeing a stranger, bustled out importantly to demand his credentials; but, on observing d'Orsay, who

had now followed, he pulled obsequiously at his forelock. "Good-evening to you, my lord," he greeted the Count politely.

"And to you, *mon vieux*." D'Orsay handed the man a coin, which Charles, while hardly believing his eyes, saw was a guinea. "Is Madame still upon ze stage?"

"Yes, my lord. Thank you, my lord," replied the delighted doorman, who was, however, well accustomed by now to the Frenchman's careless generosity. "But she will be off shortly. Shall I escort you to the Green Room?"

D'Orsay smiled. "*Mais non, ne vous-dérangez pas*. Come, Monsieur Charles. This gentleman is with me, Tim."

Tim stood aside. Although the very same man who had once waited with scant patience to take the small Charles out to Madame's carriage, he showed no sign of recognition; but he did, on learning that Charles accompanied Count d'Orsay, mark the fact by another pull of the forelock. Charles wondered if he, too, should reward the fellow, but was too diffident to attempt it.

D'Orsay led the way along the same passage, down which, seven years ago, Charles had walked with Vestris; they passed the place where the impecunious actor, Francis Finch, had stood awaiting Madame's pleasure. D'Orsay, however, did not go upstairs, but down a few steps instead, and, in a lower passage, he opened the door of the Green Room.

Charles saw before him a most charming apartment, which showed none of the dingy wear and tear peculiar to the back premises of a theatre, but which resembled rather some modish salon. For here, as in the front of her playhouse, the refined and expensive taste of Vestris prevailed. From the ceiling, prettily decorated with cupids, to the prints, some of them by Bartolozzi, Madame's grandfather, which hung upon the walls, the room expressed a character, gay without tawdriness, elegant without ostentation. A fine carpet covered the floor, brocade upholstered the chairs and sofas, flowers adorned the mantel. Charles, looking about him, stood enchanted.

The Green Room was empty, except for two ladies talking

upon a sofa, and a man who slept peacefully upon another, and who, in order to do this, had stretched himself out, a newspaper under his feet and a handkerchief covering his face. The rouged cheeks and elaborate costumes of the ladies proclaimed them to be actresses, and they returned d'Orsay's bow with smiles of easy familiarity. They did not rise, however, but continued their conversation in whispers.

"Have you never visited a green room before?" inquired d'Orsay, who had noticed Charles's air of surprised admiration.

"No. And I had no idea that it would be so fine a place as this. So richly furnished."

"Nor are most green rooms, *mon ami*. But as I say to you, Madame Vestris is a ver' clever woman. And she knows how to maintain—*l'illusion*. We from outside, we come here to see ze players who have so charmed us on the stage. And Madame presents them to us in these pretty surroundings. She understands, you see, the value of such a *mise-en-scène*. *Elle a emphatiquement du genie*."

Charles knew enough French to agree to this most fervently. And he tried, as he walked about examining the prints and ornaments, to stem the rising tide of his excitement. The two actresses, having finished their conversation, quietly left the Green Room. The sleeper still slumbered calmly upon the sofa.

"Who is that man?" Charles asked, a little outraged to see such liberties taken with so handsome a piece of furniture.

"He is—how do you call it—an institution. An old singing-master who once taught Madame Vestris. Now that he is poor and has lost his voice, she befriends him."

"How good she is!" said Charles warmly.

"Yes. She is ver' kind to those in misfortune. Although this old gentleman, he is still useful to her. He is *clairvoyant*. And he reads ze stars."

In spite of his private belief in the powers of Garrick's dagger, Charles, who had been brought up to think all superstition wicked, looked slightly shocked, but d'Orsay continued casually enough. "There may be some truth in it. Who knows?

Vestris, she certainly believes it. But all people of the theatre are superstitious."

"How soon will Madame be here?" asked Charles, after a rather nervous glance in the sleeping astrologer's direction.

"Ver' soon now," replied d'Orsay. "She plays only in ze chief piece. *A Dream of the Future*. But you have seen ze bill, *n'est ce pas?*"

Charles shook his head.

"No? *N'importe*. It is not one of Madame's real triumphs. You saw her, did you not, in *Riquet with the Tuft?*"

"No. I have only seen Madame Vestris once. I saw her play Captain Macheath."

"But she do not play zat part for years."

"Seven years," said Charles, and he added in a burst of confidence, "I have only been three times in my life to the theatre and once was to Astleys."

Before d'Orsay could express his surprise at this, the Green Room door opened and in a voice which still, after seven years, thrilled Charles, Vestris exclaimed as she entered, "D'Orsay! My good friend! This is delightful."

Time had perhaps touched Madame a little; her detractors, even less corrupt ones than Molloy Westmacott, the *Age's* editor, certainly said so. There were lines perhaps showing about her mouth, and her eyes, still valiant, were possibly a little tired as well. She owed a little more perhaps to the skilful use of cosmetics, to her hairdresser's art. All this perhaps was true, and scarcely surprising, since Vestris, who had worked hard and loved generously, was forty. But Charles saw no change. For him her glamour and her fascination remained intact. And he gazed at her now as attentively, as rapt, as he had gazed for the first time at her seven years before.

She had discarded her stage dress and wore a lovely gown of cinnamon-coloured taffeta, its overskirt of black Spanish lace looped up with clusters of red roses. Her necklacc, ear-

rings and bracelet were all of garnets, and in the bosom of her dress were more red roses.

She held out her hands to d'Orsay, who, taking both of them, raised the right gallantly to his lips.

"You are well, *chère amie*?" he asked her. "I have a young friend here who desires to meet you."

As Charles, blushing violently, stepped forward, Vestris prepared to give him a conventional smile of welcome. Then her face changed; a puzzled look came over it. Why did this young man's eyes, blue, and round with wonder, seem so familiar? Who was he?

"This," began Count d'Orsay, "is——"

But Vestris checked him. "Stop!" she exclaimed. "Don't tell me. I know. I am positive that I have seen this gentleman once before." She turned to Charles. "You're—no, you can't be. Yes. You *are* the Quaker!"

"*Comment?*" demanded d'Orsay. While Charles, between embarrassment and pleasure, was dumb.

"You are the Quaker, aren't you?" Vestris asked him. "The little stage-struck boy grown up?"

"Yes, Madame, I am. I am Charles Baron." And Charles, who had found his tongue at last, took care to add, "I'm eighteen now."

"And so," broke in Count d'Orsay, "you are already acquainted with Madame all the time. But you say nothing. Ah, *c'est malin, ça*! How did it come about?"

"It's a quaint story," said Vestris. "And I am astonished at my own memory for faces."

"But don't you recollect," Charles asked her, "that man who said you never forgot? He was right, it seems."

"What man?"

"That actor. The man who was so sure you would remember him. The man who owed you five pounds."

"Lord!" exclaimed Vestris. "You mean Francis Finch."

"Yes, that was the name. He patted my head upon the stairs. And said we might meet again."

"Not in this world, I fear," said Vestris. "Francis died last year—poor feckless fellow."

"Will you not tell me, please," d'Orsay asked patiently, "ze so romantic story of your first meeting?"

But, before any further explanation could be given, another person entered the Green Room—a man, whose age was perhaps a little over thirty. He was undoubtedly handsome, but in his expression rather than his features lay the secret of his great charm; his eyes were so kind and merry that one hardly waited to discern their beauty, and his mouth, being humorous, satisfied without the assistance of its comely curves. He had a fine head of wavy, light-brown hair, a tall lithe figure and even the rouge and paint upon his face failed to obscure his gay and virile personality.

"Charles. *Mon cher* Charles!" Charles started at d'Orsay's words, to find that the Count had not addressed himself, but the new-comer, on whom, with outstretched hand, the Frenchman now advanced, and proceeded in Gallic fashion to embrace warmly.

Vestris said, laughing, "This is Mr. Mathews, my Quaker. Charles—but how confusing this is! Let me try again. Charles Mathews, allow me to present Charles Baron."

Mathews held out his hand. "How do you do, sir? I am delighted to meet you. But what is all this about names? You have stolen mine, eh? Is that the trouble?"

"My father gave it to me, sir. You must blame him." Charles somewhat surprised himself by giving so bright an answer, but the engaging friendliness of Mathews had put him at ease.

The actor laughed. "Very neat, sir. Oh, very neat! Did you hear him, Eliza? I like my namesake. Most decidedly, I like him." And he clapped Charles on the back.

"But wait until you hear my strange story," Vestris said. "Do you recollect, Charles—Charles Mathews—my telling you of an adventure of mine? An adventure with a Quaker."

"Fie, Madame, for shame! With a Quaker? Is nothing sacred to you? No, I do not recall any such adventure."

"Ah, then, perhaps I never told you of it. Nevertheless it happened. Seven years ago, just before I opened the theatre. And this gentleman here is the very same Quaker."

"*This* gentleman? But you said seven years ago. The Quaker must have been the merest infant then."

Although Mathews's eyes twinkled, Charles felt obliged, for his dignity's sake, to emphasise his age again.

"I am eighteen, sir," he said importantly. He spoke to Mathews but he looked at Vestris, hoping that the significance of this great age might at last strike her; but she had begun already to describe her first encounter with him, and without heeding, she continued her recital, which was punctuated by many expressions of amusement from Mathews and d'Orsay.

"He was such a dear little boy," she told them, "that I was really most reluctant to let him go."

"I didn't want to go," Charles added to this. "But you made me. You sent me away in your carriage."

"Heigho! So I did. And what of your good, patient brother? Had he caught cold?"

"Yes," Charles answered soberly, "he had."

"And were you whipped?"

"No. Not that time."

"But surely," d'Orsay asked Vestris, "you must have asked this so fervent admirer to visit you again?"

"She did," Charles burst out excitedly. "Do you not recollect, Madame? You said, 'Come and see me again. Come when you are eighteen.' And thee gave me a dagger. And now I—I *am* eighteen."

The breathless vivacity of this speech, to say nothing of Charles's side-slip, caused a general burst of laughter, for several other persons had entered the Green Room and had been listening much diverted to Madame's story. Charles observed that he was now the centre of a small crowd and looked very sheepish.

"Splendid fellow!" exclaimed Mathews, coming to his aid. "You are asked by a lady, seven years ago, to call upon her when you are eighteen, and you do it. There's constancy for you, Eliza!"

"But," Charles admitted naively, "it is only by accident that I am here this evening."

D'Orsay explained. "Yes, zat is so. It is I who play ze good fairy. I find this young gentleman at a ball. *Ma foi!* So dull a ball! I leave. And he leaves also. He leaves, because"—the Count paused to give Charles the faintest suspicion of a wink—"because, like me, *il s'ennuie*. And so we come together in search of better amusement. Is zat not so, Monsieur Charles Baron?"

Charles nodded gratefully. He would not have liked Vestris and all these people to know that he had fled shame-faced from a ball because he could not waltz.

"And who," asked a pleasant-faced man, "may this constant gentleman be? Should we not be presented?"

"He is Mr. Charles Baron," announced Vestris, "and you must all of you know him. Now this, Charles," she indicated the man who had spoken, "is Mr. Planché, who writes me so many fine plays. This gentleman here, Mr. Dance, the author of our main piece to-night. This lady is Mrs. Orger; and this, Miss Murray. Mr. Hughes, let me present you also. And—— Ah, Edwin, how glad I am to see you. And our good Fontebanque." She advanced to greet two gentlemen who had just entered the Green Room.

Charles looked with great interest at the assembled company—actors and actresses playing at the Olympic itself, professional visitors, including the vivacious Mrs. Orger; and such distinguished outsiders as the two last arrivals who, he learned, were Mr. Edwin Landseer, the famous painter, and the journalist, Albany Fontebanque. Finding himself at home among such eminent and cordial persons, Charles could hardly help contrasting the friendly atmosphere of the Green Room with the vacuous formality of Hertford Street. He had not

felt so happy, so at one with his surroundings, since the days in which he used to visit the O'Briens at Oak Tree Cottage. His self-esteem returned, warming him with its glow, and he longed for Rose to see him, longed to prove to her that he could, in some society, more than hold his own. And his desire to become an actor, to mix on terms of equality with such charming people, grew and grew.

"You have recovered from your indisposition, Charles, I am glad to see," said Edwin Landseer to Mathews.

"Altogether, thank you. But what a pother I caused!" Mathews added to Charles in explanation, "I was actually taken ill upon the stage and had to have the curtain rung down on me!"

"What happened then, sir?" Charles asked.

"I was borne off to my dressing-room too unwell to protest. And my good friend, Mr. Palmer," Mathews, smiling, nodded at a gentleman standing near, "rushed into the breach. He took the part up where I had left it without turning one hair even."

"Not outwardly, perhaps," observed Mr. Palmer, "but I can assure you that I quaked *inwardly* like any jelly."

Charles regarded the speaker with great awe, trying to imagine what it might feel like to be called on to play another's part at such alarmingly brief notice.

Later, as he made one of a group that had collected round Count d'Orsay, Charles observed Mathews and Madame Vestris talking together; they stood close to the sofa, upon which the astrological singing-master still slept, and Charles saw them glance occasionally in his own direction. Then Mathews beckoned him to join them.

"I was suggesting," he said as Charles approached, "that Madame should offer you a trial engagement."

"Come now," protested Vestris, "a joke's a joke. Mr. Baron has no doubt recovered from his stage fever. And besides, his father——"

"My father does not signify," Charles interrupted with but small regard for truth.

"But have you not already some profession?" asked Vestris.

"Yes. But that's of no importance. I am in my father's bank." At the mere recollection of this prosaic calling, Charles shuddered.

"Bankers grow rich," said Vestris.

"I don't want to be rich," Charles answered simply. "I want to be an actor."

"Mark those words, Eliza, when you come to pay him his salary," said Mathews laughing. "In my opinion, Mr. Baron should make a very good actor. You could play lovers, sir, but not the heavy kind. Or do you lean towards tragedy?" He changed his voice. "Do you desire to make the populace weep; to wring tears from hardened sinners; to create havoc in the gentle female breast? Do you desire, in short, to emulate our leading Shakespearian actor?"

Charles, not recognising this imitation of Mr. Macready's manner, looked a trifle blank, but Vestris laughed, although she shook her head at Mathews, and reproved him. "Don't be so mischievous, Charles. And don't bewilder this poor boy so. I begin to think we might try our hand at making him an actor. And yet it seems a pity to unsettle his present career."

"A pity? Nonsense! Did I not leave architecture for acting? And have I ever regretted it?" Saying this, Mathews looked with such warmth at Vestris, that Charles guessed this delightful man's love of the stage to be not unmingled with love for the lady.

Madame, returning to the matter in hand, asked Charles, "Do you seriously wish to become an actor? The life is far less easy than it appears. And you would earn very little to start with."

"I do indeed. The money does not matter." Charles's elation had carried him some way beyond the bounds of common sense.

Vestris looked at Mathews, who, without speaking, seemed

to advise her. "Very well then," she told Charles, "you may come here and talk to me again on Monday morning. Come, rather, to my office at 13 Craven Buildings. Then you shall see my manager, Mr. Vining."

"I remember him. He said I would make a child-actor."

"I see you have one of an actor's requirements already," Vestris said to Charles. "Your memory leaves nothing to be desired."

"That," declared Mathews, "is an asset indeed. And one that far too many of us lack. You recollect, Eliza, my dear father's story of Macklin?"¹

"If you are seeking to test *my* memory, Charles," she told him smiling, "I will not be caught that way. I may have heard your story, but I can doubtless enjoy it again."

"There's cunning for you!" With a gay look at Vestris, Mathews addressed Charles. "You have heard of Macklin?" he asked.

"N-no, sir. I do not think so."

"Ah, well, he has been dead now for many years. But he was a great actor in his day and my father, who always longed to go upon the stage, went, when very young, to declaim to this famous veteran. Macklin's age by then was very near a hundred. The interview turned out to be an ordeal, for Macklin, an uncompromising person, interrupted the most fiery passage of my father's recitation by suddenly barking out, 'Bow, wow, wow, wow!'"

"How unkind!" exclaimed Mrs. Orger, who had come up with some others to listen to Mathews's story. "And what did the poor boy do?"

"He was sadly discomposed, of course," said Mathews, "but managed somehow to get through his piece. Then the old gentleman, who addressed him most impressively as 'sir,' asked him to name by turn the various attributes essential to an actor. All of which, by the way, Macklin claimed to possess himself—even a quite non-existent personal beauty! My

¹ From *The Life of Charles Mathews the Elder* by Mrs. Mathews.

father answered well enough, until Macklin finally added the most important requirement on his list. 'But above all, young man,' he said"—here Mathews's voice grew slow and sonorous in imitation of Macklin—"above all—an—actor—should—possess—that—first—great—natural—requisite—that—test—of—genius—a good—good——" The voice grew angry and louder. "'I want a word! An actor should, I say, possess a—er—a good retentive—er—a good——' 'Memory, sir,' cried out my father, who could bear this no longer. 'Aye, sir,' returned Macklin, entirely unabashed. 'Aye, sir. *Memory.*'"

As the amusement following this anecdote subsided, Vestris looked suddenly weary. "You are diverting, Charles," she said to Mathews, resting her hand upon his arm. "But I am tired. I must go home, I think."

"My dear," he answered gently, "I am a brute not to have observed it sooner. Let me tell Tim at once to call your carriage, and I will warn Vining to attend to matters when the curtain is down."

As Mathews hurried away there was a movement from the sofa behind Charles, and an imperious voice demanded, "Eliza Vestris, who is this young man?"

Charles turned and saw the sleeper, who, roused by the laughter that had greeted the story of Macklin, was now awake; sitting upright, he presented a comical picture—an old man whose wrinkled face, framed by white hair, was brownish yellow in colour, and whose keen black eyes seemed to pierce through whatever they regarded. He was oddly dressed, principally in a long coat of old-fashioned cut, buttoned tightly at the neck and showing no glimpse of linen. It occurred to Charles that he wore none.

"And who," repeated this most peculiar person, "is this young man?"

"This is Mr. Baron," explained Vestris. "Charles, this is Signor Arletti, my old master. Mr. Baron, Arletti, is ambitious to become an actor."

Arletti stared at Charles very hard and considerably dis-

concerted him by doing so. He said at length as if pronouncing sentence, "You have a future, young man. When were you born?"

"In August, sir."

"The date, the date?" Arletti asked crossly.

"August 20th, 1819."

"Where were you born?"

"Here in London, sir."

"At what hour?"

"I—I don't know."

"Find out. Find out. Your mother ought to know. I will cast your horoscope, young man. I should take him, Vestris. He will, I think, be successful."

"In that case," answered Madame with a certain deference, "I will."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Exit Without Applause

THE pleasures of that evening did not end in the Green Room, Mathews insisted on Charles and d'Orsay accompanying him, after the play, to his lodgings, where, over the wine of which Charles ventured to drink but little, the two older men entranced him with their conversation. Charles was no snob; without any particular deference for rank or riches, he had a genuinely strong one for distinction. D'Orsay's brilliant appearance, the fact he had known, among many other celebrities, Lord Byron, were enough for Charles to put him on a pedestal. But it was Mathews for whom he conceived the stronger liking.

Mathews and d'Orsay seemed on most easy terms and joked together, even recalling with laughter a quarrel which had taken place between them as youths, when they had both been guests of Lord and Lady Blessington in Italy; a dispute—absurd enough in retrospect—but assuming at the time, so the participants gravely assured Charles, impressive and violent proportions.

"We would have run each other through with the slightest encouragement," said Mathews. "Or in fact without it."

"Zat is so," confirmed d'Orsay. "We thirsted, did we not, Charles, for each other's blood? And all because——"

"Because," broke in Mathews gaily, "you had accused me to Lord Blessington of carrying a sketch-book with me on our excursions and making no sketches in it!"

With this reminiscence and that, the time passed all too quickly and when d'Orsay rose at length to take his leave, Charles also rose, but with much reluctance; he would have liked to stay on alone with Mathews, who still seemed very

fresh and wide awake, but felt he would show greater civility by leaving with the Count. It was to d'Orsay after all that he owed the whole evening's pleasure.

"Well, good-bye, namesake," said Mathews, shaking hands with Charles, "or rather *au revoir*. For we shall meet, I hope, on Monday. You have quite decided to become an actor?"

"Quite," said Charles firmly.

"Excellent! Then you must remind me to find a nickname for you to avoid confusion between us. I seem fated to see myself repeated, for we have in the company another Matthews."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes. But he boasts *two* t's. And taking the way of least resistance, I call him Matty. But you, no doubt, have a nickname already?"

"No, sir."

"A pity that. In my time I've had half a dozen. My mother still calls me Twig."

"Twig?"

"Yes. My father happened to be tall and thin, you see, and was called Stick by all his intimate friends. So, when I was born they called me little Stick—or Twig. The cottage that we lived in then was christened Twig Hall."

"I like that name," said Charles, regretting that his childhood had been so much less pleasant than Mathews's sounded.

"Well, we will try and find as good a one for you. Leave it to me." Then Mathews turned to d'Orsay. "Take good care of this young gentleman, Alfred. He may be a famous actor in the bud."

Charles, who had gathered from the O'Briens that theatrical people were all envious, fond of intriguing one against the other and seldom generous in their reception of a novice, was impressed most favourably by such kindness. He commented upon it to Count d'Orsay in the carriage.

"Most actors are jealous, certainly," d'Orsay agreed, "but so are many others in what we speak of as the artistic pro-

fessions. You would smile to hear what painters and writers say of their rivals! But Charles Mathews is not like zat. Nor was his father. You are fortunate, *mon ami*, to have fallen in with a Mathews."

On approaching Bryanston Square Charles asked somewhat timidly to be set down. He hardly liked to risk clattering up to the door in a carriage, nor did he wish the Count to see his descent of the area steps. D'Orsay complied at once with this request, showing a well-bred absence of surprise, and bidding Charles good-night in a most friendly manner. Charles, after watching the handsome carriage sweep on its way, walked slowly homewards. To-night he felt he had really begun to live.

When he tried the basement window it opened easily, for Thomas had been faithful to his trust. Charles closed the window behind him, shot the catch into place, and crept without further incident upstairs to bed. But not to sleep.

As he tossed and turned, there ran through the confusion of his thoughts, like a clear theme, the determination to become, not later than Monday next, an actor; and, coupled at first with this determination, the still bolder one of telling his father beforehand of his intention. But this, as fear gained the upper hand, soon weakened. It would be impossible, he reminded himself, to speak of his ambition to one whom he never voluntarily spoke to at all and who would, moreover, inevitably be outraged by such intelligence. Not once, since Margaret years ago had dissuaded Charles from confessing his responsibility for William John's illness, had he sought out his father; not once had he admitted a fault to John or attempted to share an interest with him. The only bond between them was their mutual antagonism. No, Charles decided, he would not reveal his project. He would reveal it to no one but would leave home and begin his adventure in secret.

Even as he resolved on this plan, Charles's conscience smote him; his flight would deal a heavy blow to Margaret, all the

more painful because unexpected. Yet if he warned her beforehand, what would she do? Plead with him to remain at home, beseech him to give up his scheme, thus leaving her brother no alternative but to witness her grief unshaken or to dispel it by giving in to her. And Charles would not face the necessity of doing either. Vestris, coming back into his life with such wonderful suddenness, had offered him freedom. And he meant to accept her offer.

He had no idea of what the salary paid to a beginner on the stage might be; Vestris had warned him certainly to expect very little, but Charles supposed that little would be enough to live on and, tired of the oppressive plenty of Bryanston Square, he looked forward almost joyously to a poverty that went hand in hand with independence. The theatre would probably pay him as much as the bank did, and how utterly, how delightfully, would life differ in future from his present existence. There would be no more fixed hours, no more long days spent in adding up figures among companions as dry and undiverting as the figures themselves. Instead, there would be the lighthearted to and fro of the theatre, the fascinating society of actresses and actors.

It did not at this point occur to Charles that any hard work attached to an actor's calling; one learned lines, it is true, but this would not trouble him. His memory, as Vestris had said, left nothing to be desired. Having learned the lines, and after a little drilling, one said them. What could be simpler? It did not require much stretching on the part of Charles's imagination to picture himself soaring to dizzy heights of fame, playing leading parts to packed houses, becoming with miraculous swiftness the darling of pit and boxes alike.

His thoughts, sated with imminent glory, returned a little anxiously to love. There was Rose. And her disdainful certainty that gentlemen did not go on the stage. Well, vowed Charles rebelliously, he would show her that in this case a gentleman did. He would astonish her, too, by becoming an ornament to his chosen profession. No longer would she be

able to taunt him with being a Quaker, with being crushed by his father, with being, as she had put it, neither one thing nor the other. He would transform himself at one blow into a famous actor and a man of fashion. He would become a personage. A celebrity. An all-conquering being adored by lovely women, but remaining, in spite of past unkindnesses, faithful to Rose. It must here be confessed that Charles's desire to prove himself to her almost outweighed his love; that his longing to win the laurels which would impress her surpassed almost his longing to win Rose herself. His impatience to possess her had diminished slightly. He was ready to wait, to claim her later, when his fame would make her acceptance of him certain.

So Charles thought at first. But later, as the night changed into day and as he grew tired and chilly, the towering pinnacles of his air-castles dwindled. He felt bewildered and a little frightened. Revolt, novelty, ambition were fine things enough—viewed from a distance—but Charles, a weary and over-excited boy, docked of his sleep, and with a day's work before him, felt a fast growing panic that Monday was so near. A shrinking from the obstacles that hedged in his objective. And even, as he drew the bedclothes closer around him, an affection for the restricted safety of his home. In this state of mind, only a little while before Thomas came to wake him, Charles fell asleep.

It was not surprising, after such a night, that everything on the day following it went ill. Charles was too sleepy and heavy-eyed at breakfast to see Margaret look at him with concern and Janey with suspicion. He ate fast and started for the City early, anxious to get through his working hours as quickly as possible; but, in spite of such zeal, they dragged. All kinds of minor matters went amiss, and Charles, on being rebuked mildly by a superior, answered rudely.

That evening at dinner he saw a grim look on his father's face and imagined from it that his impoliteness at the bank had been reported. Well, he did not care; he was above the

kind of work they made him do there, and his family before very long would know it.

There was a guest at dinner; a Quaker from America whom John Baron was entertaining during his stay in London, and this man, Friend Stack by name, though a worthy person, put Charles still further into a state of irritation. The American's table manners were uncouth and his voice had an ugly twang to it. Charles stared at him, betraying, half-unconsciously, the disgust that he felt.

Stack, unaware of any hostility, began to talk to him. "Well, Friend," he said, "thy father tells me that thou workest for him at his bank. Thou hast a fine opportunity there, young man." The American spluttered slightly; a trickle of soup congealed upon his chin.

Charles gave a little shiver of distaste. "Opportunity?" he asked languidly.

"Why sure, Friend, sure. It's never too soon to learn to handle money. Now, in my country, money talks."

"Loudly, sir, I presume," said Charles and yawned.

John Baron frowned; he had observed the contemptuous way Charles looked at Stack and had been vexed by it; he resented, as always, the fastidious superiority of his younger son.

"If thou canst not keep awake at my table, Charles," he said, "thou hadst better leave it."

"Maybe thy son is tired, Friend," Stack suggested. "He has had a hard day's work, I reckon."

"Scarcely that, I think," replied John stiffly.

Janey tittered. Charles scowled at her. And William John addressed the American. "No doubt many things in England must seem strange to thee at first," he said politely

"There are many things here that I admire. But a few that disappoint me. Now take the food, for instance." Friend Stack, who was shovelling venison into his mouth at a fine pace, spoke indistinctly.

"Is the food in America so different?" Margaret asked him.

"Well, Friend, it's all a matter of what one is used to. I surely miss some of our own home victuals. Corn on the cob, for one thing, and strong coffee. But I must not grumble. There are higher things than one's stomach."

He refilled his mouth, overflowing this time, with venison. Charles gave Margaret a mischievous look, which did not escape his father.

Later, when the servants had placed the dessert upon the table and had withdrawn, the conversation reverted to the contrast between America and England.

"One thing in London that I greatly approve of," Stack remarked, "is the manner in which you English ladies dress."

"You think our fashions pretty?" Margaret asked, smiling.

"Pretty? Not that perhaps. But in America the women make a powerful fuss about dress. I declare it's almost a mania. Here the ladies dress quietly, which is as it should be." The American, without any intended incivility, paused to look at Janey, who was wearing that evening a very plain grey gown. She had put it on, not considering the company worthy of a better, but was none the less displeased by Stack's quite innocent glance.

Charles, amused, looked at her too, and Janey coloured with vexation.

"Thee must not judge our national styles by my sister," Charles said wickedly. "Thee has only to walk in the park to see how very elegantly English ladies can dress."

"Ladies," scoffed Janey. "Thee should say dolls rather. I suppose thee are thinking of thy fine friend, Miss Clifford."

"Be quiet," Charles muttered.

John, irritated already, and on the look-out for trouble, ceased to peel a pear. "There is something amiss, Charles, between thyself and thy sister. What dost thou speak of, Janey?"

"Of Rose Clifford. That always provokes Charles."

"Why should it do so?"

Janey, seeing William John open his mouth to change the

conversation, forestalled him. Into the tedium of the dining-room she sprang her hoarded mine. "Charles is in love with Rose, Papa," she said. "I know it."

"Janey, be silent!" rapped out Margaret.

John lifted his hand. "Please, Margaret! Janey shall be silent later, if I wish it, but she must first explain herself."

"Go on," Charles told Janey in a furious whisper. "Blab away if thee wants to."

"Hold thy tongue, Charles," ordered his father. "I am waiting, Janey."

Friend Stack coughed awkwardly.

"Is it true that there are frequent earthquakes in America?" inquired William John at random.

Before this question could be answered, John Baron spoke again, his voice now holding an unmistakable note of wrath. "Janey," he repeated, "I am waiting."

"It's something I should have told thee of before, Papa. It happened last summer at Longdale. Something most shocking."

"Well, child. Go on."

"Papa," intervened Margaret, "need we discuss these private matters now? We have a guest."

Stack, to show his agreement with her, coughed again; but John's annoyance had outstripped his courtesy.

"I need no instruction as to my manners, Margaret," he said, "and Friend Stack will no doubt excuse us." He glanced repressively at the American, who gave a nervous bow, then turned to his younger daughter. "Now, Janey. What was this shocking thing that happened at Longdale?"

"He—he kissed her," Janey murmured, a little daunted.

"Speak up, speak up! Who kissed whom?"

"Charles kissed Rose. He did more than that, he embraced her. It was after midnight too. Out in the garden when all the others were gone to bed. I—I saw them from my window."

"I might have known it," Charles exclaimed. Margaret's face was stony.

"And so," said his father, "thou hast grown crafty, Charles, as well as idle. Thou hast been intriguing with this girl behind my back. I always thought her a hussy."

"I love her," Charles said boldly. His indignation at the word "hussy" used against Rose had given him courage. He turned to confront his father with bright eyes; his cheeks flushed, his lips trembling a little. Because he had admitted, not a sin, but a very human passion, he even hoped to find some responding glimmer of sympathy in John's face. But he saw none.

"Thou lovest her!" John lingered on the words with bitter scorn. "Don't be a fool. What canst thou know of love at thine age? And not only that. This girl, this Rose Clifford, is not a person I would wish thee to associate with."

"Why not? She is as good as we are."

"She is the daughter of a wordly, frivolous woman. Mary Clifford may have good pious blood in her veins but she has profaned it. She is not even decently religious. Thou knewest quite well, Charles, my opinion of the Cliffords, and that makes thy conduct all the more deceitful. Besides which, thou hast no right to form any sort of attachment without consulting me."

"My attachment as you call it," Charles retorted, "is my own affair. That is one thing at least *you* cannot control."

"Charles! That is insolent! And I will thank thee to speak as thou hast been taught to."

"If you mean like a Quaker, I won't. I'm done with that."

"Oh, Charles!" Margaret's voice trembled.

John put his hand down heavily on her shoulder. "This is not a woman's business, Margaret." He addressed Charles again. "Now, sir, let us take things in their proper order. This question of Rose Clifford."

"Well," said Charles sullenly.

"Janey," asked John, "what else hast thou to tell me?"

"Nothing else," Janey admitted; the anger in Margaret's

eyes and the reproach in William John's quelled her. But then she looked at Charles; in his eyes, she read hate and, as she recalled how often he had plagued her, her venom revived. "Charles was in love with Rose at Longdale," she informed John. "Any one could see that. But she was only playing with him, I fancy. She's just a flirt."

"That's a lie!" shouted Charles.

"Oh, is it?" demanded Janey. She was prepared now, despite William John and Margaret, to enjoy this quarrel with her brother in which authority had ranged itself so solidly on her side. "I wonder! Has Rose troubled to see thee here in London where all her fine friends are? Did she perhaps invite thee to her ball?"

"She not only invited me," Charles answered recklessly, "but I went."

Janey gaped with amazement; her reference to the ball had been a mere shot in the dark, for although she had suspected, from Charles's demeanour at breakfast, some nocturnal adventure, she had never dreamed of his having gone to the Cliffords'.

Across the table, William John smiled at his brother, a smile that held encouragement and a quite friendly envy. What a fellow, thought William John, Charles was!

"What ball is this you speak of?" asked John Baron, looking sternly from Charles to Janey.

"The ball," explained Charles, "that Mrs. Clifford gave for Rose last night."

"What? Thou hast the audacity to tell me that thou wentest in secret to that ungodly woman's house. That thou hast danced at a ball?"

The second accusation, in view of what had happened, made Charles smile wryly.

His father pounced on such levity at once. "This is no laughing matter, sir. Didst thou attend this ball?"

"Yes, I did. And I'd go again. I am old enough to do as I please. And to choose my own friends as well."

That's true, thought Margaret sadly. Charles will go his own way now, and have no need of me.

"Oh," said John Baron, "so thou thinkest that, dost thou? Well, we shall see. But understand this—I am thy father and I think thee *young* enough to be disciplined. Go to thy room, Charles, and wait there till I come."

There was a silence and Charles did not move. He sat in his place at the table, his chair a little pushed back, and stared with apparent interest at the cloth. Margaret was very pale. Janey was flushed, excited and rather frightened. William John's face was calm, but he held a spoon so tightly that his knuckles were white. The American, obviously distressed, consoled himself by eating grapes.

"Dost thou not think, Friend," he ventured to ask John Baron, "that thou hast judged too harshly. Thou wert young once thyself."

John ignored him. "Go to thy room, Charles, and wait there till I come," he said again.

Margaret sprang up from the table. "Papa," she began imperiously, "Charles is not a child. What does thee mean to do? I—I forbid thee to harm him!"

"Oh, hush, Peg, I can take care of myself." Charles felt his customary ashamed embarrassment when other people, women especially, attempted to protect him.

"Thou forbidst *me*, my daughter!" thundered John at Margaret. "Thou forgettest thyself. Thy brother shalt not hide this time behind thy skirts! Thou heardest what I said, Charles."

"Yes, I heard."

"Then wilt thou obey me?"

"No." Charles had risen. As the father and son glared at each other, the insolence which as usual veiled Charles's fear, maddened John as it had maddened him so many times before.

"Leave the room," he shouted. And the accumulated dislike and jealousy of years prompted him to a threat. "Thou art not too old yet," he added roughly, "to be horsewhipped."

"But that is violence, Friend," remonstrated Stack. Margaret's hand went to her throat.

But Charles spoke almost calmly. "You will not horsewhip me this time, I think," he said to his father. "For I shall not stay here to let you do it. I am going."

"Going? Indeed? Where to?"

"I have friends," the boy answered with a certain dignity. "And a profession as well."

"A profession?" John, no less angry, was tempted to be sarcastic. "That is admirable! May one ask what kind of profession?"

Charles's chin went up. Now that the time had come he found it easy enough to announce his decision. "I am going on the stage," he said loudly.

"The stage, young man?" gasped Friend Stack.

Janey's nerves betrayed her into a high-pitched giggle. Once again William John watched Charles with envious admiration.

John, for a second, was too astounded to speak. "Hast thou taken leave of thy senses?" he inquired at last.

"Not at all," Charles replied; his father's stupefaction had made him temporarily master of the situation. "I am going to be an actor. I do not think *you* need be sorry. You should be glad rather, that I am going away. I think you hate me. And you have made me hate you. I've feared you too, but I don't fear you now. I'm going. And no one can stop me." Then, seeing Margaret's piteous face, Charles wondered if this was true.

John was still too shocked and astonished to be violent. "This is some infamous pleasantry, Charles," he said. "Thou canst not stand there and ask me to believe that thou—one of *my* children—wouldst become a play-actor. Wouldst go on the stage. The stage is the devil's playground—a sink of iniquity. No! It's impossible."

"Why?" Charles asked him scornfully.

"*Why?*" John repeated, almost in a daze.

"It's not impossible at all. Merely because you're too narrow to allow others enjoyment; because you think of nothing outside religion and money-grubbing—is that a reason why people who are cleverer and more cultured than you should not go to the theatre? Or act in the theatre either? There's nothing wrong about it. There are actors and actresses worth a thousand of the pokey old hypocrites you fill this house with! No sane person thinks the theatre wicked. I don't suppose even God thinks so—that is, if He exists!"

"Young man!" moaned Friend Stack. "Young man!"

"Stop!" roared John Baron, outraged by Charles's last remark. "Stop, I say. Thou art blaspheming."

"No," said Charles wearily, "I'm not. I'm talking sense."

His very coolness infuriated his father; hurling his chair to one side, John advanced, his face crimson with passion, upon his son.

"I say thou art blaspheming," he raved. "And blaspheming is a mortal sin. Get down on thy knees, boy, and ask God to forgive thee."

"No," said Charles. "I won't." His lips twitched with a grin of pure nervousness. His father's fury might be melodramatic; it was also alarming.

John, taking the smile to signify derision, raised his clenched hand and Margaret screamed. But William John with a deft movement stood between Charles and his father.

"Charles spoke honestly, Papa," he said. "He did not intend to blaspheme."

"Of course I spoke honestly." Charles's dignity had collapsed leaving him only the pettish anger that follows fright.

John Baron's hand dropped to his side. The reasonableness of William John had discomposed him. "Then go," he told Charles thickly. "Go before I do strike thee."

"I am going. And I shall never come back." Charles turned on his heel. He felt a little sick at having provoked such violence; a little ashamed, too, and not by any means a fine, brave fellow. But he walked resolutely to the door.

William John checked him. "Will thee not say good-bye?" he asked, holding his hand out.

Charles gripped it. Seeing the kind, troubled expression in his brother's eyes, his own filled with tears. And he could not look back at Margaret.

She gave a cry of anguish and started forward, but John almost sprang at her. "Let him go!" he commanded. "I forbid thee to follow him."

Charles, still without looking at her, left the room. As the door closed behind him she sank into her chair, covering her face with her hands.

"Thou wert too harsh, John Baron," came from Friend Stack sadly.

Janey, whose attempt to distract herself had proved far too successful, began to cry and William John walked over to the window.

"No one," ordered John Baron in a voice that shook. "No one, do you hear me, is to leave this room until I say so?"

After that nobody spoke. William John, standing by the window, lifted the heavy damask curtain.

The front door slammed and almost simultaneously came the sound of a breaking glass. John's grip had snapped the stem of his in two.

"He has gone," said William John, and dropped the curtain.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A Trick to John

THE substance of Charles's quarrel with his father had been overheard by Thomas, who had made a number of superfluous excursions from the pantry in order to listen at the dining-room door. When Charles came out, Thomas, in the act of retreating towards the basement, was able, unobserved, to watch his young master from the back of the hall. He saw Charles hesitate for a short space outside the dining-room door; saw him glance uncertainly towards the staircase, feel in his pocket, the contents of which appeared satisfactory, and at last, after taking his hat and coat, leave the house.

Thomas also hesitated but not for long. With great caution he, too, opened the front door. He closed it quietly behind him, walked slowly until out of view of the front windows, when he began, as if pursued by a cavalry charge, to run.

Charles, already some way ahead, walked with a dogged rapidity and did not look back. He had left the square already.

"Master Charles, Master Charles," panted Thomas, gaining on him.

Under a street lamp Charles stopped and turned round. His face, in the pallid glare of the gas seemed very white; his eyes met Thomas's expectantly.

"What is it, Thomas?" he asked. "Did Margaret send you?"

Charles imagined for a moment that Margaret, even in so short a time, had contrived to send the footman after him with a message. And he had wished this improbability to be true. To have left home for ever without speaking to her, without even saying good-bye, had given him a sense of great isolation; for he was, in spite of his frequent impatience at her fondness,

so used to his sister, that he felt, in being cut off from her, completely forlorn.

"No, Master Charles." Thomas had never been able to break himself of this juvenile mode of address; for all his eighteen years, Charles still seemed to the footman the same audacious little boy who had teased him to be taken to Drury Lane and had shouldered so heroically the full consequences of their joint misdemeanour. "No, Master Charles," he repeated. "I 'aven't seen Miss Margaret. Nobody sent me. I come hafter you because—well, sir, because of what's just 'appened."

Charles could not resist a grin. "You were listening at the door then?" he stated rather than asked.

"Yes, Master Charles, I was—so 'elp me. And a crool shame it is, that's what I say. The Master's a——"

"No, Thomas. Don't abuse my father. Could you expect him to be pleased?"

"Then it's true what you said, sir? You're going for a hactor?"

This military phrasing applied to the comparatively pacific profession of acting amused Charles. "Yes," he said, "it's true. I'm going to try my luck in the theatre, at any rate."

"You'll soon be the talk of London, Master Charles. And I'm coming with you."

"Coming with me? On the stage, do you mean?"

"Lord, Master Charles," said Thomas, with a simper, "you can always joke, can't you? Me on the stage indeed! Now if that isn't a good one! But you know that wasn't what I meant, sir. I meant I was coming with you as your servant."

"That's nonsense, Thomas. I couldn't pay your wages. I've got that money the tailor wouldn't take from me and nothing more. Until I start earning, that is."

"You shouldn't 'ave said that, Master Charles," exclaimed Thomas reproachfully. "You shouldn't 'ave spoke of wages. What would I want with wages from you as 'ave always been so good to me?"

"Oh, Thomas," Charles's voice shook a little; "what a fool,

what a dear fool you are! I know you want to serve me, and I know you don't care for money. But you must live—and so must I. And I cannot afford a servant."

"But Master Charles——"

"No, Thomas. It's impossible. But please believe I'm grateful. And now listen, because there's something that you *can* do for me."

"Anything, Master Charles. You know that."

"Well, I shall want my clothes."

"Shall I fetch them, sir?" asked Thomas, ready apparently to collect Charles's whole wardrobe and deposit it at his feet on the pavement.

"Not now, Thomas! They must be packed and then you'll need a hackney coach to bring them in. Will you do that for me?"

"Very good, Master Charles. Where shall I bring them to?"

"Where shall you—why, Thomas, I don't know."

"You mean you've got nowhere to sleep to-night, Master Charles?"

"No. Now that I come to think of it, I haven't. But I'll soon find somewhere." Charles wondered whether he might appeal for one night's hospitality to Charles Mathews, but rejected this notion swiftly; to arrive like an outcast on a mere acquaintance's doorstep would make a pretty poor beginning to a career. But he knew no one else in London beyond his father's friends, and Daniel Ellesmere, and could not in the circumstances approach any of these.

"I'd better find an hotel," he said, though rather doubtfully, for he knew next to nothing about hotels and supposed the more reputable ones to be exceedingly costly. Twelve pounds might sound a handsome sum of money, but it would not last him for ever.

"No, Master Charles," advised Thomas, "don't you do no such thing. A place like that would swindle you properly. Would you go to a lodging if it was clean and decent?"

"Of course, if I knew of one. But I don't."

"I do, though. You go along to Frith Street, Master Charles. No. 8 Frith Street, Soho, and ask for Mrs. 'Opkins. She's a respectable widow woman what lets lodgings. And I'm hacquainted with 'er daughter." Here Thomas looked immensely arch. "Just say it was me what sent you and Mrs. 'Opkins will be glad to noblige."

"Why, that's fine, Thomas. What a useful fellow you are. No. 8 Frith Street?"

"Soho. Mrs. 'Opkins. Daughter of the name of Betty. I 'ope you won't think it a liberty."

"Think what a liberty?"

"Well, sir, it is one, in a manner of speaking. Mixing a gentleman like you with my"—Thomas again looked arch—"my *hamours*."

Charles chuckled. "Don't be an owl, Thomas. And stick to English! I'll be proud to meet Miss Betty. Now you understand, don't you, about my clothes?"

"Yes, Master Charles. I'll bring them to Frith Street to-night."

"No, no. Not on any account. You might get into trouble. Bring them to-morrow when my father is out. Tell Miss Margaret what I've asked, and she'll contrive it for you. And, Thomas——"

"Yes, sir."

"Give my love to my sister. My dear love, do you understand, and ask her to——" Charles left his sentence unfinished. He had meant to say, "Ask her to forgive me;" but he could not easily send such a message by a footman. And besides, as he knew very well, Margaret had forgiven him already.

"Just my dear love," he said. "And the address of these lodgings. And when you pack my clothes, Thomas, remember to pack my dagger. It's in the small drawer where my cravats are."

"That I will, Master Charles," replied Thomas, who had a very great reverence for this relic.

"It might be useful to me now, you know," Charles added

hastily, not caring to admit his belief in the dagger's luck-bringing properties.

"Ah," said Thomas profoundly, "that it might. Macready and Kemble'll soon be taking fright, I reckon."

"You flatter me! Well, good-bye, Thomas. Be careful now how you approach Miss Margaret. My father might be suspicious."

"Hover my dead body, sir!"

"God bless you, Thomas." Charles held out his hand.

"Oh, Master Charles," stammered Thomas as he took it.

After a hearty handshake Charles, without further ceremony, started to walk away; he walked fast and, as if to encourage the passers-by in general, and himself and Thomas in particular, began to whistle.

Thomas waited on the pavement to watch his favourite out of sight. "So 'e thinks I'm not going with 'im, does 'e?" he remarked out loud. "Well, 'e'll find out by to-morrow that 'e's mistook."

An old gentleman who was passing stared apprehensively at Thomas, and evidently thinking him a lunatic, made haste to cross the street; but the footman, quite unruffled, watched until Charles's form became indistinguishable in the darkness. He then with a most resolute bearing returned to the house, where, as the servants already knew that something untoward had happened, no immediate rebuke fell upon him for his absence. It appeared that Hester, carrying down a tray, had passed Margaret, who ran by her on the staircase, her face deathly pale and with tears streaming down her cheeks. Janey, too, it was rumoured, had sought her own room in evident discomposure.

Farren, after waiting in vain for the bell which usually summoned him to clear the dining-table, had at length come up from the basement to investigate, and encountered John Baron only just leaving the dining-room. William John, beside his father, was talking earnestly.

"No, my son," Farren overheard John say. "I respect thy

brotherly affection, but the subject is closed. Never, *never*, dost thou understand me, will I hear Charles's name mentioned again."

With these words, John strode upstairs to his study and William John, observing the butler, had, by speaking to him sharply, astounded that pontifical personage still further.

"Get about thy business, Farren," he ordered, "and do not pry into matters which don't concern thee."

Farren could have been knocked down with a feather. To be so spoken to, and by, of all people, mild-mannered William John!

Friend Stack, much distressed by the scene he had witnessed at dinner, had crept unhappily into the deserted parlour. It was his duty, he knew, to wrestle with John Baron, to point out to him that such violence and obduracy ill became a Quaker. But the American, overcome by the amount he had eaten and by an honest sympathy for Charles, could not bring himself to perform this duty. He wanted to go to sleep and would undoubtedly have done so, had he not taken up a copy of the *Ladies Magazine* which, somewhat surprisingly, absorbed his complete attention.

Belowstairs, the servants questioned Thomas, who was assumed, accurately, to have been off in pursuit of Charles. But the footman, usually so garrulous, became on this occasion discreet; more than that, he became untruthful. He could not deny that Charles had left the house, nor that he himself had followed him, but he could, and did, deny most emphatically that he had caught him up.

"I know no more of Master Charles's hintentions than what you do," he told his audience firmly, "and it's more than likely that 'e'll come walking in again later."

There was a groan of dissent at this, for no one, least of all a domestic servant, favours an anti-climax. Farren, having overheard what John said, knew better, and although too dignified to share such knowledge with his inferiors, would not have been above hearing anything relevant that the

footman might have to tell; but, as Thomas professed to know nothing, Farren at once recollected that his subordinate had left the house without permission. Not only did the butler relieve his own injured feelings by berating Thomas, he even threatened to report him to John Baron.

This left Thomas unperturbed, however. He knew that not even Farren would dare approach his master that evening and he meant on the following morning to discharge himself—without the preliminary of giving notice. Thomas's chief concern at present was how to deliver Charles's message to Margaret. She had gone to her bedroom, where he, a manservant, had no possible pretext for following her, and he stood too much in awe of Hannah to employ the housekeeper as his ambassadress.

Happily, Thomas's problem was solved by the arrival downstairs of Hester, come to announce that Mrs. Baron was in strong hysterics. Why Charles's mother, who had never professed for him more than a fretful toleration, should have reacted so dramatically to his departure no one knew. But the fact remained that she had done so. Hester, in a flutter already with excitement and curiosity, had lost her head and, unable to find Hannah, she dashed to the kitchen to seek assistance from the cook.

At this fresh intelligence of disaster—even of so commonplace a kind—the domestic staff fell into a still more enjoyable turmoil. Mrs. Mead bustled off importantly while every one else talked at the tops of their voices and the kitchenmaid brewed strong tea. Thomas, who had been granted an inspiration, slipped away unnoticed.

Upstairs, he approached very carefully the door of Margaret's bedroom where he felt quite positive that Hannah was; he listened, recognised the housekeeper's voice and withdrew to conceal himself behind the curtain of a bay window. In this sanctuary he proposed to wait until his hope was realised—the hope that Hannah, hearing the commotion in Mrs. Baron's apartment, which was upon the same floor as Margaret's, would

eventually go there to assert her authority and to overrule Hester.

He was not disappointed. Sophia's wails and screams grew so much louder that the door of Margaret's room opened and Hannah, massive and outraged, emerged.

"Do pray go to thy mistress, Hannah," Thomas heard Margaret say, "Hester will never calm her." And then to his despair she added, "Perhaps I should come with thee. My step-mother will always listen to me."

"You'll do no such thing, Miss Margaret," the housekeeper declared stoutly. "You're not to trouble your head about anything, my dear. And as soon as I've got the mistress quiet I'm coming back."

Thomas, for the first time in his life, commended Hannah's force of character and, as she hurried away along the passage and Margaret closed the door, he emerged, breathing freely again, from out of his hiding-place. He advanced towards Margaret's room furtively, on tiptoe, and on reaching the door he knocked.

"Who is it?" The query was put in a tense, exasperated voice as if Margaret was resolved to admit no one else but Hannah.

Thomas was in a quandary. He did not wish to raise his voice or even speak to Margaret from the landing and so, for Charles's sake, he committed a most daring impertinence. Without a further knock, he opened the door and, mitigating this indiscretion by closing his eyes, announced hoarsely from the threshold, "Soho. Eight, Frith Street. And 'is dear love." Before Margaret could speak to him he had vanished.

Much later when the house at last was quiet Margaret sat writing a letter; the room was lit only by two candles standing on her writing-table; the fire had burned low. She was writing to her father and in the morning, before leaving home, she meant to put the letter in John's study.

Margaret was going to her brother; because Charles, for all his fine plans and his courage, would need her care. She

had told herself this and almost believed it. He was so young still, and in the ways of the world a child. She had money enough for both if they lived simply, and she would dissuade Charles naturally from the shocking life he had chosen to lead. She would prevent him from becoming an actor; but she would not ask him to return home. He was better away from Bryanston Square and so would she be. Margaret sighed with pleasure. In living with Charles, what peace, what liberty would she find at last. They would take a cottage somewhere, a little outside London. At Fulham perhaps or, better still, at Highgate where the air was so fresh and pure. She would keep house for her brother and they would have a little garden. She would be waiting for him each evening when he came home from work. For he must work—not act.

She would have a home of her own now. Not in the same joyous sense perhaps as had she married Daniel, but her own at least. She would have a little maid, or possibly two, instead of a large, difficult staff of servants. She would have a piano, and go when she wished to hear fine music. She would play the hostess to Charles's friends. And here was a most important reason why he must abandon the stage. She could not fill the cottage with loud, disreputable people nor risk her brother becoming entangled with some improper woman. She supposed, with a little pang, that Charles would some day marry. But never, Margaret vowed to herself, should his wife be Rose Clifford.

Her planning was interrupted by a knock on the door, and, thinking it was Hannah come to bring her some warm milk, Margaret called out, "Come in."

She began to write again and did not turn her head until a hand, large and heavy, quite unlike Hannah's plump one, rested upon her shoulder, and she heard her father say, "Thou art writing late, Margaret. What is it that occupies thee?"

With the instinctive gesture of a guilty person she shielded the paper with her arm and looked up with frightened eyes into John's face.

"What art thou writing, Margaret?" he asked her.

"I—it is nothing, Papa."

"Be careful. Thou hast never lied to me yet." John, not roughly, but with great decision, forced her arm away and took the unfinished letter. Bending a little to catch the light of the candles, he read it. And then he tore it in half.

What he had read appalled him, for it was totally unexpected; seeing his daughter writing, he had assumed her letter was for Charles; the knowledge that she proposed to leave him struck John a crushing blow.

He said nothing, because he could not trust himself to speak, but crossing to the fireplace, he threw the pieces of the letter into the grate and stood there with his back to Margaret, watching until they were gone. When at last he turned, his daughter, who still sat, half-terrified half-defiant, at the writing-table, was moved by the ravaged misery of his face.

"Papa," she cried, springing to her feet, her voice, in spite of all that had happened, pitiful.

John swayed a little and she ran to him. "Papa, you are ill. Sit down." She pushed him gently into an arm-chair that stood before the fireplace. John's body slumped against the cushions as if all strength had gone out of him.

"I am not ill, my child," he said simply; "but thou hast broken my heart."

"Oh, Papa!" Margaret could have endured the wrath she had expected, but this acceptance of defeat, this almost gentle sorrow was harder to bear.

"That thou shouldst want to leave me," continued John. "*Thou!* My first born, my darling. My beloved Margaret's child. That thou shouldst consider leaving thy father to throw thy lot in with a headstrong, sinful boy, who has caused me nothing but pain. Oh, God, have I deserved this?" He buried his head in his hands and Margaret, to her horror, saw his body shake with sobs.

She dropped on her knees beside him, pleading, "Papa, I beg thee not to. I cannot bear it. Don't, oh, don't, suffer so."

John looked up. His eyes were wet but Margaret was almost glad to discern in them a glint of familiar anger. "Not suffer?" he demanded. "Not suffer when the best loved of all my children leaves me. And for such a reason. Not suffer!"

"But, Papa," Margaret tried haltingly to excuse her project, "Charles needs some one to care for him. To dissuade him from this mad plan of going on the stage.

"I no longer care," said John, "whether he goes on the stage or not."

"He is thy son, Papa. Thy child as much as I am"

"No, Margaret. Not one of the others, not William John nor Janey even, is as much my child as thou art. Thou art *her* child as well. As for Charles, I have finished with him. He is no longer numbered among my children."

Margaret disregarded this. "Papa," she suggested timidly and with very faint conviction, "I could make a home for Charles—and believe me, he needs it—and still come to and fro from our home to thine. I could——"

"No!" John's answer rang out clearly. "Thou couldst do nothing of the sort. Such an idea is an insult. If thou leavest here to-morrow, it is over. Go to the boy if thou must. But understand, thou, too, wouldst then cease to be numbered among my children. Now, decide!" His voice broke.

The decision should have been easy, yet it was not. Margaret, instead of making it, gazed miserably at her father; her eyes filled with perplexity and pain.

John went on. "There is thy choice, Margaret. Take it. I cannot keep thee here against thy will. I cannot deprive thee of money since thou hast thine own. Thou art thine own mistress, child. But remember this—some years ago thou settest thy *step*-brother higher than a lover and lost that lover. Now it seems thou settest him above a father. Well, I cannot help thee. Thou must lose that father too, it seems—and I—I must lose thee."

He felt for Margaret's hand and whispered to her, as he held it against his breast, "My little girl. My Margaret. Thou

lovedst thy father once. We had some merry times, my precious, did we not? Just thou and I together. Dost thou remember?"

Margaret did remember. Back through the years she saw herself and her father together; at the breakfast table when she had scolded him for taking so many lumps of sugar in his tea; in the parlour before dinner when she had warmed his slippers before the fire and ordered him majestically to take off his outdoor shoes; at night in the study when he had read to her in the great arm-chair and, when she grew sleepy, had carried her in his arms upstairs to bed. Yes, they had been good friends once. No one had come between them.

"Papa," she began, then stopped, not knowing what she could say to him. With her head thrown back a little, she still gazed up at him earnestly. Her hair, unbound, hung softly about her face, restoring much of its youth. Her loose robe fell open revealing her neck's white curve.

"Margaret!" John cried hoarsely. Bending forward, he kissed his daughter full on her parted lips, but the cry and the kiss were both for her dead mother.

And with that kiss, a coldness melted in Margaret's heart; an inner voice urged that this was her father; who, for all his cruel injustice to Charles, had fondled her as a baby, with whom she had played, whom she had mothered with a small girl's self-important devotion. In the grief-stricken man, who sat in the dying firelight, she saw the ghost of that kindly, vanished father; an image which so filled her eyes, that even Charles's face receded into the background.

Margaret rose from her knees. She put her arms round John, who with a weary gesture, leaned his head against her. It was a weariness not unmingled with triumph.

"I'll try to grow young again, my love," he promised softly. "We'll laugh as we used to—eh, my Margaret. Thou must teach me to laugh again."

"Yes, dear Papa," said Margaret sadly. She knew he would not keep his promise. She knew he did not know how to. And,

through all the strong, unreasoning emotion that engulfed her, she could still resent faintly his assumption that he had won. But why, since he *had* won? His need of her, that made him defenceless, had earned his victory over Charles, who, by his own defencelessness, had triumphed over Daniel. Margaret knew in her heart that Charles was defenceless no longer. He was young and strong, and well armoured. John was none of these things. And so Charles lost for the time his first claim upon her.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Old Friends

CHARLES rang the bell at Number Eight Frith Street, where after some delay, the door was opened by a tall grim woman; she had a leathery, roughly used appearance and might have been any age from forty-five to sixty.

"Mrs. Hopkins?" he asked timidly.

"Yes. I'm Mrs. Hopkins," replied the widow in an uncompromising tone of voice and regarding Charles with no apparent interest; a manner which, although he could not know it, formed part of her stock-in-trade. Some landladies greet the stranger at their door with effusive cordiality; others with suspicion; and others with seeming indifference. Mrs. Hopkins favoured the last method.

"I understand you let rooms, ma'm," said Charles, still more timidly.

"I do, young man. But I've none to let now. I'm full." Mrs. Hopkins, who seemed to enjoy making this crushing announcement, started to close her door.

Charles, not having anticipated any such contingency, was the more disconcerted by it. "Oh, but please," he begged, "I was sent to you by Thomas—by Mr. Ford."

Mrs. Hopkins's manner changed. "Well, now!" she exclaimed. "Why didn't you say so before, sir? Mr. Ford. A most genteel person, to be sure. And so he sent you, did he? Well, I take that very kind of him and so will my daughter."

"Then can I have a room?" Charles was not greatly drawn to Number Eight, the exterior of which was narrow and dingy, but having walked all the way there at a hot pace from Bryanston Square, he did not feel fastidious. Any sort of house, provided it offered him shelter, would suffice.

"I'm sorry, sir," Mrs. Hopkins expressed a genuinely civil regret. "But what I told you was gospel truth, more's the pity. All my rooms are took. I let the last one to a gentleman only this morning. That is if he is a gentleman, which I don't think he is. From the looks of him, I'd rather have took you."

This statement, though balm to Charles's self-esteem, did not provide him with a bed to sleep in. He stared blankly at Mrs. Hopkins wondering what to do next.

"You want a room for to-night, sir?" she asked.

"Yes. Couldn't you find me——"

"Not a nook nor cranny!" interrupted Mrs. Hopkins, as if to forestall his suggestion. "There may be persons what lets apartments, what would accommodate you on the parlour sofa or make a bed up on the kitchen table. But I wouldn't think of it. Packing lodgers in like that is not genteel. No, sir, I couldn't do it. Not even though you was sent here by Mr. Ford."

"Never mind," Charles told her wearily, "I must look elsewhere, I suppose."

"Now wait a minute, sir. Why not inquire at Number Seventeen? They may have a bedroom there what isn't took. In fact," added Mrs. Hopkins with professional malice, "they're sure to. Number Seventeen's never full."

"What sort of place is it?" Charles asked; peering past Mrs. Hopkins into her gloomy hall, he inquired with a shameless insincerity, "As nice as this?"

"Well, sir," replied the landlady, gratified, but still proof against any cajolery that might lead to the parlour sofa, "I can't say that it is. I'd only be taking advantage of you if I did. In fact, there's drawbacks to it—but never mind them now. It would suit you well enough for a night or two. And I might even be able to oblige you myself later on."

As the suggestion seemed a sensible one, Charles thanked Mrs. Hopkins for having made it, and after listening to some wholly superfluous directions how to reach a house that was only a little farther along the street, he bade the widow good-bye and left her.

It occurred to him on his way to Number Seventeen that he had omitted to warn Mrs. Hopkins of the arrival next day of Thomas with the luggage; but this matter, Charles decided, could well be left till the morning. The landlady of Number Seventeen might, in spite of her rival's prophecy, be unable to oblige him, and he would then have to extend his search for hospitality still further.

On reaching Number Seventeen, Charles found it to be a larger house than Number Eight and attached to a shop, the window of which was shuttered for the night. As Mrs. Hopkins had not mentioned the occupant's name, Charles tried to discern this written over the shop front, but, the street being very ill-lit, he failed to do so. After searching in vain for a bell beside the narrow door which seemed to be the entrance to the house itself, he knocked instead, and while awaiting a response to his summons, bent down to caress a large cat, who seemed also to expect admittance and who, less aloof than the majority of its kind, rubbed against Charles's legs as if promising him a welcome. And, although obliged to knock more than once, Charles accepted the animal's friendliness as a good omen.

The door was opened finally by a young servant girl; she had red hair, a round good-natured face and was very untidy. The cat slipped quickly past her into the passage but turned back to look tolerantly at Charles, who now perceived it to be a handsome tortoiseshell.

"You bad Lawrence," the girl said lovingly to the cat. "What mischief have you been about this time?" Then, smiling broadly at Charles, she gave him good-evening.

"Good-evening!" he returned, struck with the contrast between her reception of him and that of the widow Hopkins. "I want—that is, may I see the lady of the house, please?"

"Would it be a room you was wanting, sir?" the girl inquired.

"Yes, please, if you have any. One, I should say."

"Step inside, sir. If you'll wait in the parlour I'll fetch the Missus."

Charles followed the young woman down a passage and into the parlour which was at the back, behind the shop. She begged him to make himself at home and then withdrew.

Lawrence, the tortoiseshell cat, had preceded them and from a position of authority on the hearth-rug mewed affably, as if inviting an opinion of the parlour, which Charles, to oblige him, proceeded to examine. It was a medium-sized room, so overcrowded with furniture and knick-knacks, as to give the appearance of having been prepared for a sale by auction.

Much space was occupied by a piano, so large in proportion to the room's dimensions, that its presence caused the rest of the furniture to be far too tightly jammed together. Upon the piano amid a clutter of books and music, lay a violin case. A music-stand leaned up against a wicker table loaded with ferns, and one end of the sofa was so shaded by this foliage, that it seemed to be situated in a dwarf forest. In the centre of the room, hemmed in by chairs, stood a round table with a lamp on it, and as cluttered as the piano; among a medley of other objects, Charles observed a work-basket, some men's stockings and various feminine garments, no doubt awaiting repair. The chairs, of every size, style and shape imaginable, supported a corresponding selection of antimacassars and cushions. The wallpaper's design had to be guessed at, so obscured was it by pictures, brackets, fans, pipe-racks, miniatures and china plates. And Charles felt oddly at home in this confusion, almost as if he had seen it all before.

As he approached the fire to warm himself and to stroke Lawrence, a picture hanging above the mantelpiece attracted his startled attention. It was a portrait. Charles found the face of the sitter, an opulent lady of southern appearance, dressed gaudily rather than with taste, undeniably familiar. On closer view and despite a certain licence on the artist's part, he recognised beyond all doubt the features of Mrs. O'Brien, the one-time chatelaine of Oak Tree Cottage. Recognition might

indeed have come sooner, but for Charles's old friend having been painted fully, if eccentrically, clothed, and with her hair dressed in the most formal splendour. He had never to his knowledge so beheld her.

He wondered if by some fortunate chance he had found the O'Briens themselves, or whether another explanation of the portrait's presence there would be afforded. Too deep in these conjectures to hear the parlour door open, he did hear a voice, a pretty, Irish voice, a little husky in tone, inquire, "Are you the gentleman who wanted a room?"

Charles wheeled round to see a young woman on the threshold. She had considerable beauty of a faintly rakish description; her dress although disorderly was gay. And she was certainly Kitty. Seven years seemed, at first glance, to have treated her kindly. And if she was a little plumper now than then, and a good deal more painted, Charles hardly observed it. He was too lost in the pleasure of seeing her again and in his old admiration of her pretty blue eyes.

"Kitty!" he greeted her joyfully.

"I beg your pardon, sir," a slight hauteur in Miss O'Brien's manner gave place to a frown of perplexity. Charles, a little boy, when she had seen him last, had changed considerably, yet his face struck her as being familiar.

"Have you forgotten me?" he asked, a little discouraged.

"I can't say that I—— But wait one moment. You're very like—— No, but you can't be."

"Don't be too sure. Do I resemble then, some one you used to know?"

"Yes, indeed, sir, you do. But——" Kitty hesitated, still frowning.

"Do I resemble at all the little Quaker?"

"Charlie! Is it possible?" Her face cleared charmingly. "Little Charlie Baron—Jack's friend. Oh, you must please excuse me. I do remember you now. Very well, in fact. But you are quite grown up."

"It's seven years since we met," Charles pointed out. "Did

you expect to stay the same size always? You," he added gallantly, "have not changed at all."

"There's a pretty speech. You've had time during those seven years, I see, to kiss the Blarney Stone! But what in the world has brought you here?"

"I thought your servant had told you that already. I want a lodging. I was sent here by a neighbour of yours who couldn't oblige me herself. A Mrs. Hopkins."

"That old cat! You may thank your stars that she couldn't. You can have a room here and gladly. But why——" Kitty checked herself, not wishing to seem inquisitive.

"I've left my home," Charles told her briefly. "And must find somewhere else to live instead."

"Well! And to think of your coming here. There's providence for you! Pa will be delighted."

"I recognised this," Charles said, indicating Mrs. O'Brien's likeness.

"Poor Ma! How fond she was of you. She died two years ago."

"I'm sorry," Charles said gently, and he was silent, regretting the easy-natured Italian woman with her plentiful supply of sweetmeats.

Kitty changed the subject. "Maria," she said, "you recollect Maria, is married. She took a soldier and has gone off with him to foreign parts. And Beatrice has a husband too. They live in Dublin."

"And Jack?" Charles asked.

"Ah, Jack! There's a rolling stone for you. Sometimes he's with us here, but more often he's not. He's a *Jack* of all trades, I fear, and master of none. But how glad he'll be when he does come home, to see you. Now sit down, Charlie, pray, or should I say Mr. Baron."

"No, you should not!" said Charles. "Is your father here? I'd like to see him."

"So you shall. Later. Pa's not in just now." A shadow clouded the brightness of Kitty's face.

"Is he out playing at the theatre?"

"N-no. Pa doesn't work much now. He gives a few lessons still and keeps the shop. You saw the shop, didn't you, as you came in?"

"What kind of a shop is it?"

"Oh, musical instruments, music albums and so on." Kitty with a certain defiance, raised her chin, as if daring Charles to inquire if business prospered.

But, without seeming to notice this, he asked her, "Now tell me about yourself, please, Kitty. Are you still on the stage?"

"No. Not any more. There's plenty to be done at home, you see. There's Pa to look after." Again that shadow and, as if to dispel it herself, Kitty continued gaily, "I must find Sally now and set her to prepare your room. After that, I'll make a bowl of rum punch, I think, to drink to old times in. Eh, Charlie?"

She smiled at him so softly, that Charles, although perceiving by now that her face, in spite of rouge and powder, was a trifle worn, her chin a trifle heavy, forgot these blemishes easily. He thought only of the comfort of seeing her again, the attraction towards her that he still felt. How kind she was, how clear and candid her blue eyes had remained.

"Make yourself comfortable by the fire," she said, "and I'll be back with the punch in a jiffy."

Charles, fresh from an abstemious household where all strong liquor was frowned on, felt more than a little doubtful about the punch; but as he did not betray his greenness by a refusal, Kitty went off smiling to prepare the brew and to give her instructions to the servant, Sally. In the delight of seeing Charles again she had almost forgotten her relief that one of her vacant apartments had at last been taken. But relieved she undoubtedly was. For life had not dealt gently by Katherine O'Brien.

She was soon returned to the parlour; and it may have been through some fancy of her own that the punch she brought

with her was distinctly weak; or else she knew, perhaps, that young men, in their desire to be manly, were not often wise. Whatever the reason for her forethought, the results were agreeable, for Charles, while taking his drink with bravado, enjoying the glow which even weak punch induces, remained perfectly sober.

Watched over benignly by the tortoiseshell cat, he talked contentedly to Kitty and very soon acquainted her with the adventure upon which he had just embarked. She applauded his independence, sympathised with his aspirations and congratulated him warmly on having obtained the patronage of Madame Vestris.

"I have you to thank for that," Charles told her. "But why did you not come yourself? I looked for you outside the Olympic."

"I never went there. For poor Ma was ill. The first of those fainting fits that troubled her so later. Now, tell me more about Madame."

Charles complied. Kitty seemed to think his success as an actor definitely assured, an opinion which, in contrast to the stormy scene at home, Charles found most soothing. He was soon at peace with himself and in a most comfortable accord with Kitty. He talked to her about Margaret and William John, about Thomas and his loyalty; he talked in turn of all his concerns save one. He did not mention the name of Rose Clifford.

When Charles and Kitty had sat together for some time he noticed that she began to glance uneasily at the clock and also, that she made no effort, when the conversation lapsed occasionally, to revive it. She seemed to be attempting by these means to convey to Charles that his presence in the parlour was no longer convenient. Although a little hurt by this and in no mind now to go to bed, he had the courtesy to suggest retiring, a suggestion which Kitty, with unmistakable eagerness, fell in with.

"You must be tired, poor boy," she said, speaking so sweetly

that Charles could not believe her wish to be rid of him personal. "Come, I'll take you up to your bedroom. It's in the front of the house, and the very best one we have."

Charles rose at once. "You are tired, too, no doubt," he said. "You should have turned me out before."

"Oh, no, I'm not tired," declared Kitty, yet betraying a bitter weariness that puzzled Charles. Changing her tone, she then continued gaily. "Come, Charlie. I am wondering what Pa will say when he hears the little Quaker is his new lodger."

"Will he be home soon?" Charles inquired as he followed Kitty upstairs.

"Not soon, I think. At least, I scarcely know," Kitty looked over her shoulder at him with a troubled expression. "It's hard to tell with Pa."

On the first floor she stopped and opened the door of the bedroom assigned to Charles, which, like the parlour, contained more furniture than was strictly necessary, but derived from this very congestion a cosy appearance. If Sally's dusting had been cursory, Charles did not notice it. The bed looked large and inviting. A good fire burned in the grate.

"There, Charlie," Kitty said. "I dare say this seems a shabby place after what you've been used to. But I'll do all I can to make you comfortable."

Charles, after assuring her that the room was a palace, held his hand out, to bid her good-night.

"Sleep well, Charlie," Kitty's own hand was so soft that he could not fail to give it a gentle squeeze; it was the hand of a friend, of one who had accepted his plans, fears and ambitions at their face value without blame or expostulation or derision. And Charles had need of such a friend.

Kitty withdrew from him, blushing a little. "I'll send Sally to you in the morning," she said, "but not too early. And you must tell her what you fancy for breakfast. Remember that I'm here to look after you." This air of a motherly landlady sat oddly on the pretty, rakish girl; but, so charmingly

also, that Charles felt a fervent gratitude to Mrs. Hopkins for having turned him away.

When Kitty had left him, he made haste to get into bed, keeping his shirt on to compensate for a lack of night attire. The bed was soft, the sheets harsh, but clean, and Charles, in spite of the day's excitements and perhaps on account of the punch, fell asleep almost instantly.

But he did not sleep through the night. Some hours later, when dawn had cleared the sky, he was awakened by the sound of loud voices outside. Startled, he jumped out of bed and ran to the window. There in the street below, he saw two men, supporting a third, who was all too evidently intoxicated. His face was hidden by his hat, which had fallen forward, but something in his figure and in the Irish voice that sang "*Una voce poca fa*" so thickly, told Charles who he was. Philip O'Brien had always favoured Rossini.

Some one opened the front door, and Charles heard another voice—a woman's. Kitty was letting in her drunken father. Charles withdrew from the window. He did not wish to pry into her unhappy secrets. But, back in bed, he wondered, with a rush of pity for O'Brien's daughter, whether the violinist often came home so late and in such poor order. Then once again Charles fell asleep.

He was roused soon after ten o'clock by the smiling, red-headed Sally who, handing him a sloppy cup of coffee, inquired whether he fancied gammon. Charles said he did. He then presented the maidservant with a shilling, and sent by her a message to Mrs. Hopkins, requesting the widow to direct Thomas on his arrival to Number Seventeen.

Later, Charles breakfasted in the parlour, a privilege, it was explained to him by Sally, not usually granted to the lodgers, who were expected both to eat and sleep in their own rooms. Miss Kitty, the servant told him, was in the shop and the master still lay abed. This last piece of information was accompanied by a sniff of disdain.

The gammon disposed of, Charles went in search of Kitty.

A second door led from the parlour to the shop—a gloomy little emporium in which the overcrowding tendencies of the O'Brien family had again been given full sway. There were musical instruments of all types and sizes—violins, clarionets, guitars, fifes, piccolos, violin-cellos, two oboes and a dilapidated double bassoon—all second-hand, all poorly displayed and dusty. Broadsheets, ballad albums and books relating to music lay in disorderly heaps. The place was dark and a charcoal stove supplied more fumes than heat. But, as if set against these defects, a jar of yellow chrysanthemums brightened the counter where, majestic and watchful, the cat, Lawrence, sat; and Kitty, in spite of a draggled silk dress unsuitable for the morning, still contrived to look prettily out of tune with her dingy surroundings. As Charles entered, she was joking good-humouredly with a filthy old beggar-woman, to whom she had just given sixpence and who was backing out of the shop, calling down all the blessings of heaven on Kitty's head.

"That's enough now," Kitty told her, laughing. "You'd better save some of those compliments for the next one! And shut the door, my good soul, pray. I'm freezing."

"Good-morning, Kitty," said Charles, and he tripped over the double bassoon, which in its turn reeled drunkenly against a battered 'cello.

"Bad luck to the thing!" exclaimed Kitty, as Charles respectfully set the bassoon upright. "That's a perfect Jonah, that double bassoon is. Poor Pa was swindled over it in the first place, and I vow no one will ever buy it. It's stood there for a year now without a nibble. How did you sleep, Charlie?"

"Like a top," Charles answered, and seeing the dark shadows under Kitty's eyes feared that she could not say likewise.

"All through the night?" she asked, a trace of anxiety behind her question.

"Yes, indeed. Through every bit of it. My bed's a beauty."

"And your breakfast? How was the gammon?"

"Capital. Thee—you're very good and kind to me, Kitty." Charles frowned at his slip, but Kitty smiled.

"Why not 'thee?'" she asked him. "I like it. It reminds me of the old days at Oak Tree Cottage when Jack used to marvel so at the quaint way you talked."

"I dare say," Charles retorted. "But I don't want to be marvelled at, or to be thought quaint either. I'm not a Quaker now. I've finished with them."

"Ah, well, I expect you're right, Charlie. But you must give me a 'thee' and 'thou' from time to time. Just to cheer me."

"Why, Kitty! Do you need cheering?"

"Who doesn't?" she said carelessly, as if regretting the implication of her previous speech. "This shop now is enough to give one the mopes. Did you ever see such a pickle?"

Charles thought it hardly courteous to agree with her. He hesitated, wondering whether to suggest, as an improvement, some soap and water and a good sweeping, but the noise of the hackney coach containing Thomas spared him the necessity of an answer.

As Kitty felt herself bound to await the improbable entrance of a customer, Charles went without her to superintend the transfer of his luggage from the coach to his room; a task performed by Thomas, hindered rather than aided, by the girl, Sally. Charles noticed, however, with some amusement, that in spite of sundry admonitions such as "Now 'ave a care, young woman, 'ave a care," and "If you can't shove no 'arder than that, my dear, don't shove at all," Thomas eyed the red-haired servant with considerable approval.

In the bedroom, Thomas looked around him with an air of patronage, as if to give his sanction to the apartment.

"It might be worse, Master Charles," was his verdict. "It might be much worse."

"Have you no letter for me, Thomas?" Charles asked impatiently. "No message from my sister?"

"She didn't give me none, Master Charles. But she packed your clothes with her own 'ands, and she wouldn't 'ardly let me touch nothing. She was crying 'er 'eart out too."

Charles, turning away, went over to the window. So Margaret had cried her heart out, but had sent him no message. The sense of isolation swept over him strongly and, with his back to Thomas, he stared out at the street.

"There's not hover-much space 'ere," he heard the footman complain. "I'll 'ave a job, Master Charles, to find room for all your things."

"Oh, never mind. That's my concern. You'd better go now, Thomas, or there'll be trouble for you when you reach home."

"I am 'ome, Master Charles," was the impressive answer.

"Now what in the world do you mean by that?" Charles demanded, turning round.

"I mean, sir, that your 'ome is mine. That where you go I goes likewise. And just as soon as these suits is properly 'ung I'm going down to speak to that—to that young person about a room. I'm your valet now. A gentleman's gentleman!"

"Now listen, Thomas. We thrashed this matter all out yesterday. I can't afford a valet and I can't accept any such sacrifice from you. Now be a dear, good fellow and return to my father's house."

Thomas looked cunning. "That can't be done, Master Charles. I've left. I brought my clothes away this morning halong of yours, and my hold mother's prayer-book and all. So you see, sir, that settles—well, I never"—he had opened a small valise—" 'ere is a letter for you, after all, sir. Miss Margaret must 'ave put it there 'erself."

"Give it to me, Thomas, quickly."

Thomas handed the letter to Charles, who, once more walking to the window, broke the seal and read what his sister had written.

MY DEAREST CHARLES,—I will try not to reproach thee for the pain thee has caused me, for the pain thee has caused us all. As to thy flight from home, perhaps it is better so. But what can I say of this mad, disgraceful talk about the stage?

Oh, Charles! How can thee, after having been brought up in refinement, contemplate such a step? How can thee even dream of mixing with such shocking people as actors? There may perhaps be exceptions, but not many, I am sure. I beg of thee, my dear, to reconsider thy decision. To think very carefully before dragging our name, which is an honoured one, into such company. I am hoping with all my heart that this scheme of thine was put forward as a piece of boasting, to enrage Papa. Oh, dear Charles, please let this be so. I could not bear thee to choose such an undignified calling. And yet, my dear, I must in honesty say this—whatever thee does, whatever path thee follows, I will never renounce thee.

And now I must tell thee of what took place this morning. At the breakfast table, Papa spoke of thee most harshly and, so he said, for the last time. He exacted from all of us, from myself, thy brother and Janey, a promise that we would make no attempt to see thee nor to communicate with thee in any fashion. Thee may be surprised to hear that William John seemed disposed to argue this with Papa. I have never before heard him express himself as strongly. But Papa warned us, that in the event of our refusing or breaking the promise, he would, since thee art not yet of age, have thee found and brought back here to be dealt with severely. The promise was therefore given, by all three of us, and I am breaking it already, I fear, by writing this letter. But I could not rest until thee knew what had happened and that I still love thee.

There is one way in which I can aid thee, since Papa did not think to forbid it. I will have remitted to thee early next week the sum of twenty guineas, and a similar sum shall be sent thee on the first day of every month. Pray acknowledge this regularly to our Cousin Daniel, to whom I shall give the money to send thee, and whom I can trust. I can then at least hear from him that thee art well. Thee knows, my dear, that I can well spare this money and what comfort I shall derive from helping thee.

And now good-bye, my dearest brother. I can only wish thee well and forgive thee with all my heart.

Thy loving sister,

MARGARET.

Charles's sensations after reading this letter were mixed. While sincerely grateful to Margaret for her generosity, he yet resented the suggestion that he could not support himself; he felt an increase of respectful affection for William John and more than a suspicion that John Baron's threat had been an empty one, used merely to secure his children's obedience. Charles guessed shrewdly that his father, even to make an example of him, had no wish to bring him back, and that John was, on the contrary, much relieved to have seen the back of him.

Thomas broke in upon these thoughts by saying, "There now, Master Charles. The suits is 'ung. And I'll ask your leave now to go below and bespeak a lodging."

"You obstinate bonehead!" shouted Charles, both touched and exasperated by the man's persistence. "I've told you that I can't—that I don't need you!"

But looking into Thomas's stubborn, faithful face, Charles knew that he did; the man was all that remained of his old life, a life, with all its trials and restrictions, not wholly unhappy and which could not be left behind him without a little recurring heartache and regret. Yes, he did need Thomas. And there was Margaret's money. He would use just enough of this to secure the services and companionship of a loyal servant, but not one penny more. And Charles vowed that he would not take even that little from his sister for long. He would soon earn enough both to maintain himself and to pay Thomas.

"Oh, very well," he said gruffly, "have it your own way, then."

A grin of pure jubilation stretched Thomas's mouth from ear to ear. He was not, after all, to be separated from his young master; but was to share Charles's adventures and bask in the

reflected glory of an employer who trod the boards. And also—an important point this—he would now have an opportunity to improve his acquaintance with the red-haired servant.

He went in search of her to the basement, singing—with a gusto ill-suited to the mournful words—"Twine not for me those summer flowers," one of his favourite ballads.

Sally was in the scullery drying some glasses on a soiled, damp cloth. Thomas clicked his tongue in disapproval. "That's no way to dry glasses," he remarked severely.

"No, sir?" Sally accepted the reproof with humility, for she had conceived already a vast admiration for the footman.

"No, my dear, it is *not*. Glasses is wiped over first with a clean cloth, *clean*, mind you, and then polished with a leather. 'Ere, let me look." Taking a glass from her hand, Thomas examined it with horror. "This won't do at all, this won't. Now that my master's come to stop 'ere, things must be done proper. Do you understand, my—what's your name?"

"Sally Martin, sir."

"Well, Sally, I dare say I can learn you a thing or two."

"Oh, thank you, sir."

"Not at all, my dear. It'll be a pleasure," said Thomas, loftily kind. He had observed with surprise how soft and white her arms were, nor had a dimple in her chin escaped his experienced notice. "A pleasure," he repeated, and resorted once more to song. His rendering of "And is at length that lovely spirit fled?" was moving; even strikingly so, in view of the fact that this effusion was composed originally as an ode for three voices.

Sally, her dirty dishcloth clasped against her bosom, listened transfixed. "Oh, sir," she gasped when the last poignant note had died in Thomas's throat, "you do sing beautiful."

"You 'aven't 'eard nothing yet," he said modestly. "I know an 'undred more as pretty as that one. And if you're a good girl about your work I'll sing you the lot."

"Oh, sir!" Sally was overwhelmed by such condescension.

Thomas had been studying her feet, which, although

coarsely shod, pleased him. He covered them in his mind's eye with dainty slippers. Smartened up a bit, he thought, she'd do me credit, and she's younger than Betty 'Opkins by a good seven years. "You don't need to call me sir," he told her kindly. "My name's Thomas Ford."

"Thank you, sir—Mr. Ford," said Sally.

"Well," said the footman handsomely, "to you, I'm Thomas."

Sally, at this last mark of his favour, could hardly speak.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A Novice Joins the Company

THOMAS's first task after installing himself as Charles's body-guard was the delivery of a letter to Rose Clifford; a commission which, or so he affirmed, presented no difficulties whatsoever. A young woman named Addie, between whom and the footman there had occurred certain passages of a sentimental nature, had taken service recently with Mrs. Clifford, and Thomas, having hinted mysteriously to Charles of "ways and means," proposed to entrust Miss Addie with the letter.

Although conscious of having neglected poor Addie in favour of Betty Hopkins, he flattered himself that she would, from the mere joy of seeing him again, do what he asked her. But his vanity misled him, for Addie, having learned, by some far-reaching secret service of her own, of Thomas's attentions to Miss Hopkins, and, being of an excessively jealous nature, longed to revenge herself upon him. She had the cunning to greet him with pretended pleasure, to undertake the delivery of Charles's letter to Rose, and to promise to secure an answer by the morrow. But, no sooner had the unsuspecting Thomas left her, than Addie betrayed him. Prompted by a desire to get her fickle admirer into trouble with his master, and also a little by dislike of Rose, whose manner to servants was haughty, Addie took the letter direct to Mrs. Clifford, saying, in perfidious explanation of her conduct, that it had been handed to her by one "what she knew no good of."

Mrs. Clifford was alone in her boudoir. She refrained from questioning the maidservant and, after briefly commending her caution, dismissed Addie from the room. She then opened Charles's letter and, with a sigh at the trials of maternity, read it.

MY BELOVED ROSE (he had written),—I have great things to tell you. First, you must know that after a serious dispute with my father I have left his house for ever. I am at present in lodgings at the address written above and am at last quite *independent*. No rules and regulations. No more Quakers! And now, my very dearest love, I will tell you what I am resolved upon doing, and beg you most earnestly not to be angry. I am going to be an actor. And I must assure you, dear Rose, that you are *quite* wrong in thinking that the theatrical profession is of necessity vulgar. Madame Vestris, of whom I have told you before, is not only a wonderful woman, but a person of culture and refinement as well. Her gowns off the stage are as tasteful as your own. Although, of course, she is no longer very young. And Mr. Charles Mathews, who plays leading parts at the Olympic, and who has been most kind to me, is in every sense of the word a *gentleman*. The story of how I came to meet Madame Vestris again must keep till I see you. It is very entertaining. But the great thing, my darling, is this—Madame has promised me an engagement! And I am to visit her again on Monday to settle all particulars. So you see that the career I longed for is almost begun.

Please, dearest, do not upbraid me. Madame Vestris and Mr. Mathews both believe that I have a future and I am vain enough to agree with them. Will you trust me and wait for me until I have become established? Would it not please you to have a husband as famous as Mr. Macready? (He also is a most genteel person.) It will not be long, I promise you, before I am in a position to marry. Oh, Rose, my darling, do not give me up! Do not be led away by that longing you spoke of at the ball for wealth and pleasure and fashion. I will, I swear, be able to provide you with comfort, and what greater pleasure can there be, dearest, than love? As for fashion, you would be happier by far in the society of talent and genius than that of chattering and coxcombs. Oh, Rose, if you will only be constant I can give you so much joy.

And now, my dearest, I must see you. How can we contrive

this? Your mother, I fear, will think me even less acceptable as a suitor than before. Though perhaps even she will change her mind later. But, as I say, I *must* see you. Write to me, my love, and suggest some means of our meeting. That good fellow, Thomas, has left my father's service in order to be with me and he has, it seems, some method of conveying letters to you. It is regrettable to be so underhand, but what can we do? I cannot bear to be completely cut off from you.

I will write no more at present. But do, my very dearest one, send word to me *quickly*. Even if you are angry I would sooner hear that than nothing. And tell me that you love me, which I still dare to hope you do.

With my whole love to you,

CHARLES.

Mrs. Clifford, who was, outside her own interests, romantic, could hardly restrain a tear. The letter seemed to her so ardent. And it was touching, she thought, to love so eagerly, so irresponsibly and with such an utter lack of worldly wisdom.

"Poor, foolish, reckless boy!" she exclaimed; but, recalling the designs of this same poor, foolish, reckless boy upon her daughter, she frowned instead of weeping and read the letter again. Charles, there was no doubt about it, had behaved like a madman. To break with a rich father, to choose the stage of all places on which to make his fortune. It was sheer lunacy! And yet, recollecting her own dislike of John Baron, Mary Clifford could not but feel a sneaking admiration for his son, who had defied the strait-laced old bigot and chosen the way of adventure. Mrs. Clifford's own *penchant* for the sensational stirred a little. But she quelled her weakness sternly. To condone young Baron's foolhardiness was one thing; to encourage or facilitate his advances to Rose another. And not, of course, to be thought of. An actor, a penniless striving actor as Rose's husband? Never!

Mary Clifford had guessed, to her vexation, that Rose was more than a little attracted to Charles Baron. On the night of the ball, finding that he had left without bidding her good-bye, the girl's whole bearing had become excitable and capricious; so much so, in fact, that, as Harry Tempest confided sulkily next day to Mrs. Clifford, he had not been able even to frame his proposal—Rose having wantonly refused to be serious for a single second. Now this, thought Rose's mother, would never do. Sir Harry, pre-eminently the son-in-law she wished for, must on no account be scared off. She had enough worldly sense to know that men—even when deeply in love—will not, beyond a certain point, tolerate levity and caprice. And Tempest, a vain man, might reach that point too quickly. Rose must be engineered, therefore, into a different and more becoming frame of mind, and Mary Clifford, having vowed to make her daughter Lady Tempest, foresaw that to achieve this object she would have need of tact and great decision.

Undoubtedly, the first step was to check any communication whatever between Charles and Rose. And Rose, of course, must know nothing of the intercepted letter. Once persuaded that Charles had left home to start his great adventure without a word to her, without apparently giving her one thought, the girl's pride would revolt. Mrs. Clifford smiled with satisfaction. She knew her daughter would never make the first advance, would never, unless encouraged by the boy himself, pursue Charles, and she believed that once Rose deemed herself slighted, Harry Tempest's cause would be safe.

Puzzled, Mrs. Clifford reflected on the behaviour of Addie, resolving to question the maid, praise her discretion more highly and, if necessary, to reward her. For the rest, the other servants must be given precise instructions. Taking up Charles's effusion, in order to destroy it, she heard a step outside, and fearing the entrance of Rose, put the letter hastily behind her, forcing it for safety down the back of her chair. The door opened, but only to admit a footman, come to announce that callers were in the drawing-room.

With Mary Clifford social duties held precedence, and composing herself swiftly, she went below.

It was close on dinner-time before Kitty's father left his bed, and when he came, heavy-eyed and unshaven, to the parlour, Charles found the change in his old friend distressing; but O'Brien seemed cheerful enough, his jolly brogue was unabated and he greeted Charles with much affection.

The dinner gave signs that Kitty had made a special effort; there was a plump roasted fowl with abundant greens and potatoes; a dish of sweetbreads and a pudding as well. Kitty had spent some time assisting in the kitchen, and Thomas had set the table, doing this with a formal correctness hitherto unobserved in Frith Street.

During the progress of the meal itself, perhaps on account of Thomas's insistence on serving it, there was some restraint, more particularly on the part of O'Brien, who found the presence of what he mentally termed a "flunkey" disconcerting. But, when Thomas had gone below to eat his own dinner with Sally and, incidentally, to shed his austerity, the Irishman became loquacious. Bringing out a bottle of port and consuming the better part of it himself, he proceeded, as of old, to entertain Charles with his second-hand anecdotes of celebrities. That evening, his talk was mainly of music and musicians. He had stories to tell of tragic Weber, and of Rossini, whose greater personal popularity had fretted the uncomely German; although the Italian composer, so O'Brien declared, had forfeited the good opinion of many by the extreme parsimony which belied his genial manners.¹ O'Brien spoke of Bellini, creator of *Norma* and of his untimely death, preceding by only a year that of the enchanting Malibran, who had so divinely interpreted his music. Of Donizetti and the serious-minded Mendelssohn. And of that strange, dark virtuoso, Paganini.

"Sure, and there's a queer story about that fellow," he said.

¹ This legend of Rossini was later proved unjust. It was found after the composer's death that he had been saving all his spare money, in order to endow a Home for poor musicians.

"You must know that he's well set on himself and as full of whims and fancies as a well is of water. And when he's after practisin', not a soul's allowed within a mile of him! But one day in Marseilles, the Signor is fiddlin' away for dear life, when he hears a rustlin' and scrabblin' in the chimney, and after a while this disturbs him. So he sends for his servant and tells the fellow to light a fire. 'Tis some bird up the chimney,' says Paganini, 'let's be after smoking it down.' So the fire's lit and servant sent away, and the fiddlin' begins again, and then—what do you think?"

"I've no idea, sir," said Charles.

"All of a sudden, a voice in the chimney starts to cry out, and it isn't the voice of a bird. It's a man's voice and he's in a rare takin' too, and no wonder. For he's bein' smoked alive! So Paganini throws some water on the fire and he bawls up the chimney, 'Who's there. What are you doing?' 'Suffocatin', Signor,' comes back the answer, and down falls the intruder, smothered with soot and half-choked with smoke, and with the soles of his boots scorched. 'I'm only a poor fiddler, Signor,' says he. 'I've been wishful for years to hear your honour play and could never afford to. But I've heard you to-day. And it was worth it!' And Paganini, they say, was so tickled that he's after adopting the fellow and taking him to America."

Charles, smiling at this incident, expressed his regret at not having heard the world-famous violinist perform, to which O'Brien, who had just swallowed another glass of port, retorted peevishly, "Sure and why should you, me boy? You have heard meself. And what has Paganini that I haven't, except that high-soundin' foreign name of his?"

"I've always understood, sir," Charles ventured, "that his remarkable style of playing——"

"Bah!" O'Brien interrupted. "That's trickery! And flummery too. Why, if I'd condescend to make a mountebank of meself as he does, I'd be after making me fortune. Style of playing, is it!"

He drank more port, growing the more boastful and embittered, until Charles, partly to relieve Kitty's uneasiness and partly from a genuine desire to hear him, begged her father to play to them.

O'Brien agreed to this promptly. With his old fiddle under his chin he appeared as a man transformed; as his bow tore music from the strings, his face seemed actually less coarse and bloated, his eyes less bleary. His touch was delicate and sure; his hands, which shook when he held his glass, were now controlled and masterful.

He played on, changing from this tune to that, apparently unmindful of his audience. He played a sweetly tinkling minuet of Mozart's and two airs by Chopin, a composer whose music, new to Charles, reminded him of clear running water. From the limpidity of Chopin, O'Brien swung without effort to the formal gaiety of Strauss. And to Highland melodies, mournfully lovely. Then to his well-beloved Rossini. At last, half-way through Bellini's "Vaga Luna," he stopped abruptly, laid his violin down on the piano and returned, with a gesture of discouragement, to the table.

"I wish you would continue, sir," said Charles sincerely.

O'Brien reached for the port. "Ah, and what's the use?" was his petulant answer. "I'm after playin' as well as the next of them, and what good does it do me? Who wants me? I'm a failure, I tell you, me boy. A failure!" He burst into tears.

Much perturbed, Charles rose from his chair, but Kitty was at her father's side already. "There, Pa, there," she murmured softly, as though the broken creature were a child. "There! You mustn't fret, Pa. You can play as well as any one else, nay, better. But you're so lazy, dear. Why, if you'd only bestir yourself you'd be giving fine concerts all over Europe. You're a bad boy, you know, to be so idle."

Charles found it very sweet to hear her. And the effect on Philip O'Brien was magical. He squared his stooping shoulders, wiped his bloodshot eyes, saying with the blandest satisfaction, "You're right, Kitty, me darlin'. It's true what

you're after tellin' me. I'm a sad idle fellow, Charles. It's a disgrace, I am. And now for something merry to dry the tears with." He jumped up, seized his violin, and was away with an Irish jig.

That finished, he went out. Charles observed that Kitty made no attempt to dissuade him, but, with an air of patient resignation, fetched his hat and brushed away the dust and tobacco ash from his coat. When her father had left, however, which he did with a debonair wave of the hand and promise to be back "shortly," Charles noticed that her eyes had tears in them.

"Kitty, please don't be sad," he urged her.

"You see how it is," she told him wearily. "And now that you've come here to live with us I'll have to tell you. I can't keep Pa sober."

"Has he been like this for long?"

"He was always too fond of his glass, even when you first knew him, but he'd the sense then not to let drinking spoil his work. It's these last two years that he seems to have gone to pieces. I think he misses Ma."

"All this is hard upon you, Kitty."

"Ah, well, I'm fond of Pa. And he's right too, when he says he could have done fine things. He plays like an angel when he chooses, as you heard just now. And *I'm* right when I say that it's indolence as much as drinking that has been his ruin. Poor Pa!"

Charles would have sooner said "Poor Kitty"; but he merely asked whether it was to look after her father that she had given up acting.

"Partly," she answered. "Ma needed care, too, before she died. But there's no need to pity me, Charlie. I was never much of an actress. Pa and I do well enough together, except for money. It's the lack of that which troubles me most."

"Your father makes very little, I suppose?"

"Practically nothing. He can still get pupils, but he never keeps them long. If a person wants a lesson at night, Pa's out

drinking. In the morning he's sleeping it off. Oh, I shouldn't let him have the money, I know, but what can one do? He'd lose his reason, I believe, without liquor, and if I do hide a shilling or so he's sure to find it."

"Does the shop pay at all?"

"Nothing of any consequence."

"And the lodgers?"

"I've had plenty. But the respectable ones leave on account of Pa's habits and the other kind—well, I'm better without them. You were the first person who'd been here for five weeks."

"But Kitty, how do you manage?"

"Ah, well," she answered, a little evasively, Charles thought, "I do. Beatrice and her husband have been very good to us."

"I'll tell you one thing," Charles said eagerly. "You'll find it easier now. There'll be the rent for my room and for Thomas's as well."

"What a kind boy you are, to be sure."

"No, I'm not. I think it's a great shame that you should have all this trouble. You ought to have a home of your own and be married."

Kitty was silent for a minute. Then she said quietly, "As to that, Charlie, I am married."

"Married? But Kitty——"

"It's something I don't care to remember. But you may as well know. I married before I was eighteen and he turned out a rogue. We'll not talk of it again."

It was Charles's turn now to be silent; while Kitty, in an altered voice, continued, "That's enough of my miseries now. In fact, too much. But it's so long since I've had a friend to console me. We are friends, aren't we, Charlie?"

"I should think so!" Charles took her hand and, with more assurance than on the previous evening, pressed it.

"You're a good fellow, Charlie," said Kitty smiling, "and I wish you better luck than I've had. Both in riches and love. You are in love, I suppose."

Charles was taken aback. "Why, yes," he replied uncertainly, "I am. A little—I mean a great deal."

Kitty withdrew her hand. "Then you must grow rich quickly and marry her. She's a fortunate girl, I think, whoever she may be. And we won't sit here any longer moping over the fire like a couple of witches. Pa will be gone for hours and it's a fine evening. Will you take me for a walk?"

"Indeed I will," Charles answered, not knowing whether to feel relieved or disappointed that Kitty had shown so little curiosity about his love affair. On the whole, he felt relieved. He realised with a little start of surprise that he did not want to talk of Rose to Kitty.

Sunday passed quietly; and all too slowly for Charles, who could do nothing but brood on his imminent interview with Madame Vestris, and longed impatiently for Monday; but Thomas, involved already in complications of an amorous nature, found the day not a moment too long. Rather the contrary, since he was, between Miss Betty Hopkins at Number Eight and Miss Sally Martin at Number Seventeen, more fully occupied than was quite comfortable. Life in Frith Street promised to be anything but dull for Thomas.

Monday came at last. Charles dressed himself early, and with the most extreme care, trying first one suit and then another, and regretting that he could not at such an hour make his appearance at Craven Buildings in full evening array. He tied and then discarded at least a dozen cravats, set his hat at this angle and that, and was altogether so captious that Thomas's trials as a valet may be said to have begun in good earnest.

At length, and considerably in advance of time, Charles started. He walked the distance from Soho to Wych Street, wondering as he went whether the passers-by could gauge from looking at him the extreme significance of his errand.

It was barely eleven o'clock when he halted outside the Olympic, before making his way to Craven Buildings, where Madame now conducted her business affairs and which was

situated behind the playhouse. Charles had paused to indulge himself in the pleasurable reflection that he would from now on be little concerned with the front of the theatre; for him, in future, the freedom of the stage-door! Having dwelt for a few moments on this delightful prospect, he proceeded to Craven Buildings.

At Number Thirteen he gave his name to a sarcastic-looking boy, who came out of a ground-floor room to inspect him and who, after telling Charles to wait, went upstairs in a most leisurely manner, calling down almost immediately that Charles was to come up also. This he did and was shown into a small, dull room and instructed to remain there until Mr. Vining was ready. The boy then eyed Charles carefully from head to foot, was evidently unimpressed by the result of this scrutiny, and departed.

Beyond a few play-bills on its walls the waiting-room offered Charles little distraction. Some copies of the *Theatrical Observer* lay on the table and these he studied, until, finding it impossible to concentrate, he turned to the advertisements compiled by a certain Paul Pry—a form of literature more suitable to one in Charles's overwrought mental condition than the dramatic criticisms which the paper contained. Mr. Pry, putting no great onus on the intelligence, urged his readers to sample the excellent mulled ginger wine and improved brandy supplied by Bretts in Drury Lane; suggested a visit to Madame Tussaud's Waxwork Exhibition where many elegant improvements had been recently effected; and spoke most glowingly of the Florentine Anatomical Exhibition in Margaret Street. Here, declared Paul Pry, it was possible, between the hours of nine and five daily, to admire splendid anatomical figures of Venus and Adonis modelled from nature and as large as life; a private inspection for ladies, he considerably added, was available every evening from five until seven, when a female would be in attendance.

But, as not even the entertainment offered by Mr. Pry could succeed in occupying Charles's mind, he soon discarded the

Observer to station himself at the window, from where he obtained a clear view of the street and of the little courtyard which enclosed the stage-door of the Olympic. He saw Tim smoking a pipe upon the threshold, and observed a number of ladies and gentlemen hurrying into the theatre.

Engaged in watching this activity, Charles started violently at hearing the voice of Mr. Vining, who had opened the door of an inner room into which he requested Charles to follow him.

This apartment, although plain and business-like in appearance, proved a good deal more comfortable than the waiting-room, and was, moreover, warmed by an excellent fire. Vining bade Charles be seated while he finished looking over some papers. The manager's manner was civil, but by no means expansive, and he gave no sign whatever of having encountered his visitor before.

It was some five minutes before he laid aside the papers, and asked briskly, "And now, sir, what can I do for you?"

"I—that is—I thought," stammered Charles, "I should say, sir, that Madame Vestris requested me to come here."

This statement seemed to surprise Vining. "What is your name again?" he asked.

Charles told him.

"Baron," murmured the manager vaguely. "Baron? Ah, yes, I remember now. Madame asked me to see you. She wishes, I believe, to offer you an engagement." And he added hastily, "A small engagement."

"Yes, that was it, sir," replied Charles with great decision.

"I confess," said William Vining, "that I do not quite see why——" He checked himself, and inquired, "What previous experience have you had, Mr. Baron?"

"Experience, sir?"

"Yes, yes. Experience. What parts have you played?"

"Er—none, sir." Charles felt this admission to be most damaging, and Vining raised his eyebrows.

"None?" he repeated. "Strange. Nevertheless, I have been

requested by Madame Vestris to engage you." He smiled faintly in a condescending sort of way as if disclaiming all responsibility for Madame's whims. Charles felt exceedingly apologetic.

Playing with his pencil, the manager continued, "We have already a piece in rehearsal. Dr. Millingen's *Carlo, the Watchdog*, which will go into the bill on Thursday. Now in that piece——" He paused, considering.

"Yes, sir?" Charles prompted eagerly.

"In that piece," pronounced Vining as if in triumph, "there is no part for you."

"Indeed, sir," said Charles flatly.

"No part at all. However, since Madame wished to engage you, something will have to be done." Here Vining paused again and Charles felt even more apologetic. It was quite clear from the manager's manner that he found Madame's request an embarrassment.

"We might," he said at last, "make use of you as a super."

"A super, sir?"

"Yes. A supernumerary. You know what that means surely?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Charles; from his knowledge of the word's exact meaning he could hardly think the offer a flattering one. But still a super was a *kind* of actor. So, anxious both to secure the engagement and to bring the interview to a conclusion, he hastened to assure Vining that he would like above all things to be a super.

"Very well," said the manager curtly. "You had better go across to the theatre. There is a rehearsal in progress—or there will be very shortly. No doubt they are waiting for Madame."

"Thank you, sir. I am very much obliged to you." Charles, full of anxiety to begin his career, rose at once to his feet.

"Not so fast, young man," said Vining. "There is one other item."

"What is that, sir?"

"What is that! Sit down. Have you forgotten the question of your salary?"

"Oh, yes, of course, the salary." At the mere mention of such an important matter, Charles seemed to grow taller.

"We do not," said Mr. Vining, "pay much to supers. It is hardly to be expected that we should." And as if daring Charles to raise an objection, he looked a trifle ferocious.

"Oh, no, indeed, sir, it is not," Charles agreed hurriedly.

"Then I can take it," continued Vining, "that the usual payment given to supers will satisfy you?"

"Er—what is the usual payment, sir?" Charles asked.

Vining seemed grimly amused; having merely received a brief message from Vestris to the effect that young Baron was to be engaged, the manager had imagined the youth to be some young spark, desirous for purely frivolous reasons of going on the stage. To have his fling, no doubt. And Vining, professional to the core, regarded such a type with abhorrence.

"The usual payment," he took some pleasure in stating, "is one shilling per performance."

"I—er—beg your pardon, sir?" gasped Charles.

"One shilling per performance," reiterated Vining crisply. "That should work out at six shillings a week, provided, of course, that your services are required each night of the week."

"You mean, sir," Charles ventured, "that they might not be?"

"Exactly. You put it in a nutshell, Mr. Baron. They might not be. But on the other, if you're lucky, they might."

Six shillings a week! If he was lucky! Charles was staggered. Only that morning he had computed with Kitty O'Brien to pay her twelve shillings weekly for his room and eight shillings for Thomas's. How in the world, on a super's pay, could this be managed?

Vining, watching the expression on Charles's face, felt more amused than ever; he hoped that the humiliating smallness of the suggested remuneration would disgust this gentle-

manly applicant altogether and forestall his intention of taking the bread from the mouths of those in real need of it. But Mr. Vining was to be disappointed.

Charles, in no mind to lose his chance, controlled his chagrin, and to Vining's astonishment replied coolly, "Certainly, sir. That sum will suit me very well."

For pin money, you mean, the manager thought disdainfully, now more than ever certain that Charles regarded the stage as a frolic; but out loud he merely said, "Very well then. That's understood. You can have the engagement."

Then, looking again at Charles, he became for the first time conscious of the boy's attractions. He was well set up certainly, and handsome. His figure was admirable, and Vining now noticed, a little puzzled, that Charles's clothes, although undoubtedly good, hardly suggested those of a young man of fashion. They were too sturdy and too plain. Vining, used to all sorts and conditions of people, could not quite place his visitor. He grew more willing to admit, however, that Charles might, after all, have some tolerably serious reason for going on the stage. And he made this concession the more easily on reflecting that Vestris had never to his knowledge encouraged the type of flippant amateur that he at first had taken Charles to be.

He was about to question him further when the door opened tempestuously and Vestris entered the room herself. She came in with something of a rush and a flutter, bringing with her a whiff of heavily sweet perfume. She was as usual richly dressed, wearing a fur-trimmed pelisse, and with a magnificent Bird of Paradise feather flaunting in her bonnet. In one hand she carried a bouquet of parma violets, in the other a muff, and under her arm was tucked a King Charles spaniel puppy. Behind her, unhurried and casual, lounged Charles Mathews. The actor, on seeing Charles, consoled him immediately with a friendly grin.

Vestris hardly seemed to notice her protégé, however. "Lord, William!" she exclaimed, addressing Vining. "How

late I am. My tiresome maid forgot to rouse me and I was detained at breakfast-time by Kelly. Won't some one hold Rupert, pray?"

Charles, assuming rightly that Rupert was the spaniel, stepped forward to take charge of him.

"I trust he won't be sick," said Vestris vaguely, "but the dear atom seemed quite poorly in the carriage."

She handed Charles the dog, then declared as she turned to Vining, "There never was a creature more exasperating than Kelly! He had the audacity to reject his part in *Carlo*."

Charles, devoutly hoping Rupert's indisposition had passed, carried the little creature over to the window; a laudable attempt to give the spaniel air which was frustrated by finding the window closed.

"And what," Vining asked Vestris, "was the upshot of your conversation with Mr. Kelly?"

"The upshot, my dear William, as you know very well was that Kelly will play. Under protest certainly. But he will play. And now we shall be faced with his tantrums at every rehearsal. I vow there was never so provoking a fellow." Madame sank into the chair that Charles had vacated and buried her face in the nosegay of violets.

"My dear Eliza," urged Mathews, "I must beg you to look upon the bright side."

"Of what?" she demanded pettishly. "If you mean the bright side of Kelly, he hasn't one!"

Charles, more than a little dashed by Madame's lack of cordiality, wondered whether to slip away; but as, having appointed himself custodian of her dog, such a course seemed impossible, he stayed where he was and distracted himself by fondling the pretty little animal. Rupert, who showed no further signs of discomfort, received these advances with kindness, and after a few preliminary sniffs of investigation licked Charles's hand.

Mathews, leaving Vestris in agitated conclave with Vining, strolled over to the window.

"How are you?" he asked Charles pleasantly. "And have you settled matters to your satisfaction with Mr. Vining?"

"Yes, sir," replied Charles, and told Mathews what had been agreed upon.

"Well enough, I suppose," said Mathews, but he seemed thoughtful, and after a pause inquired, "How are you placed? Have you so arranged it that you can continue to live at home?"

"Oh, no, sir." Charles, startled by this unexpected question, explained baldly. "I had a very serious quarrel with my father and have left home altogether."

Mathews whistled. "I am sorry to hear that. I fear we have led you astray."

"Oh, no, indeed, sir. It is all for the best, I assure you."

"Well, maybe so. My own father displeased his mightily by going on the stage. Although, I am glad to say, there was no lasting quarrel. In fact, my grandfather enjoyed nothing better than to hear my father's impersonations, provided they were done for him in the privacy of his parlour. But he would never set foot in a theatre."

Charles could not credit that any such amicable compromise would be effected between himself and *his* father, but thought it better not to say so.

Then Mathews continued kindly. "You must forgive my seeming curiosity, but do you now propose to live on your earnings at the theatre?"

Charles, recollecting Margaret's twenty guineas, felt somewhat uncomfortable. "I propose to try, sir," he compromised by saying.

"H'm!" Mathews, still thoughtful, gave one of Rupert's ears an affectionate tug, and changed the subject. "Not so much of the sir, my dear boy. We stand on very little ceremony in the theatre. Remember that, my little Baron."

Charles, both pleased and embarrassed, bowed.

"Upon my word," exclaimed Mathews suddenly. "I've got it! Eliza."

"Yes?" Vestris spoke with impatience, but seeing the merriment in Mathews's face, her own relaxed. "Well, Charles, what now?" she asked more good-humouredly.

"I've hit on the very name, I tell you, for this fellow. Now listen. He is called Baron."

"We know that already," remarked Vestris.

"Very well, then—Baron. And since he's a mere child—little Baron. Hence Baronet."

"A trifle long," she objected.

"There's an abbreviation for baronet," put in Vining.

"Confound the fellow," shouted Mathews, laughing, "he has taken the very words out of my mouth! But I'll have the last word nevertheless. We proceed from Baron to Little Baron. From Little Baron to Baronet. From Baronet to Bart. From Bart—to make it more loving—to Barty. So be it, I say. Hail, Barty!"

Every one laughed. Vestris, quite restored in spirits, nodded to Charles kindly and reminded Vining of his visit to the Olympic as a child; a recollection which seemed to edify the manager and to make him immediately more human.

"You should have mentioned that before," he said to Charles. "And then I might have——" Here Vining paused as if fearing to say too much.

"Ah, William," said Mathews, "so you've been trying to scare this poor fellow off. I might have known it! We can surely make better use of him than as a super. And with regard to salary now—why not a guinea?"

Charles's heart leapt but Vining seemed unshaken. "A guinea?" he repeated gravely. "That is a great deal of money. We have no notion yet as to what Mr. Baron—or Barty can do."

"Well, well," said Mathews, "he's quite a pretty fellow. And he has to live, you know."

"To live? You mean to live on his salary?" Vining seemed astonished.

"Certainly. You no doubt believed him to be some young

coxcomb going on the stage as a pastime. Or in pursuit of the ladies."

"Well, yes," Vining admitted, "I did believe something of that sort, I fancy."

"You're wrong," Mathews assured him. "Barty here is not only a most earnest student of the drama, but he has given up a good home in order to pursue his ambition. You carried your dread of amateurs a little far, William, in offering to make him a super. Am I not right, Eliza?"

Vestris looked up from some papers she was studying. "We will make better use of him, no doubt," she promised abstractedly, "when we can do so."

"Very well then," Mathews turned to Vining. "And now about this salary. Barty assures me that he must live on it."

Charles again felt that he ought to mention Margaret's money; but, as he shrank from broaching such a subject to comparative strangers, said nothing.

"Well, in that case," began Vining with an inquiring glance at Vestris.

"In that case," she repeated, but on chancing to observe the little jewelled watch attached to her muff, she uttered a cry of dismay. "Charles! Do you know what the hour is? Nearly twelve o'clock. And the rehearsal was called for eleven. That miserable Kelly! Pray let us go across to the theatre immediately."

"Come, then, Barty," said Mathews.

So Charles, still carrying Rupert and with his status and salary as yet unsettled, proceeded to his first rehearsal.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

First Appearance

IT must be confessed that, beyond a strong interest in Mathews's clever rendering of the idiot youth, Carlo, Charles, on the whole, inclined to find his initial experience of a rehearsal a disillusionment. He had, in the first place, very little to do; assuming that he must, for the present at least, class himself with the supers, he followed the lead of these necessary but undistinguished performers, and in one scene, standing with a group of them on the stage, he shouted in unison when directed to do so; for the rest he sat in the pit watching the other players and finding this occupation, despite the excellence of Mathews, a trifle tedious. The same scenes were repeated over and over again, a process rendered imperative by the incessant hesitations and interruptions of one particular actor who, it transpired, was Mr. Kelly, and who, by holding up the play's action and disconcerting his fellow artists, continued to express his sustained resentment at the part allotted to him. He put forward endless criticisms and suggestions which were, in spite of her previously expressed annoyance, received with great patience by Madame Vestris. Charles could find no fault with the rôle in question, which was a prominent one, and he indulged in some pleasantly fantastic speculations as to the probability of Kelly throwing the part up altogether and of being himself called upon to play it. But Mr. Kelly, although remaining out of humour, showed no signs whatever of retiring.

Charles would doubtless have found the proceedings more congenial had there been any one available for him to talk to, for he could then have distracted himself by asking questions and exchanging comments. But the more important members

of the company, engrossed among themselves, ignored him, and he was kept aloof by a kind of pride from fraternising with the supers. This it must be said, in justice to Charles, was less on account of their mean and shabby appearance than from a sense of humiliation at not himself ranking as an actor proper. But, whatever the cause, his behaviour resulted in a complete isolation.

Now that Vestris and Mathews were in the theatre, Charles regarded them as beings set apart, and watching Mathews in particular, he marvelled at the skill with which this actor subdued his natural vivacity and intelligence to the requirements of his part and sunk his vivid personality into the trustful vacancy of the idiot whom he portrayed. Charles felt for such talent a reverence amounting almost to awe, and it was with considerable relief that he watched Mathews break off in the middle of a scene to consume with most mundane relish a tankard of porter. A descent from Olympus which Charles found very consoling.

The little theatre, although charmingly decorated and far cleaner than the usual run of such places, was airless and dimly lit. As the hours dragged by Charles grew sleepy and his head began to ache; he was also hungry, having made, in his excitement, an exceedingly meagre breakfast. And, noticing that several of the players had provided themselves with sundry cold snacks, he watched the disappearance of these with some envy, but as if afraid that his wistful glances might be observed, kept farther apart from the rest of the company than ever.

The rehearsal concluded, Charles was rewarded by the gift of an order for that evening's performance presented to him with Mr. Vining's compliments and the hope that he would endeavour to make use of it. As if, thought Charles, such an injunction were necessary!

Once out in the fresh air his enthusiasm for the theatre revived, while his appetite felt even keener; and, as there was not time to return to Frith Street before the play began, he dined in solitary grandeur at a chop-house in the Strand,

where, in virtue of having become an independent wage-earner, he studied the prices on the bill of fare with meticulous attention.

For the modest sum of one shilling and sevenpence, Charles feasted on roast mutton, cauliflower and potatoes, followed by cheese and washed down by ale which he did not really care for; and he added to the price of the dinner an extravagant perquisite for the waiter, who, becoming immediately obsequious, expressed a hope that the gentleman would come there often. This treatment put Charles in such a glow of self-complacency that he could not resist mentioning the fact that he was employed at the Olympic, even going so far as to promise the waiter orders for *Carlo the Watchdog*. The man, on learning that his customer was an actor, became even more obsequious and embarrassed Charles greatly by a not unnatural inquiry regarding his own rôle in the play. Mumbling a somewhat hazy reply to this and feeling thoroughly ashamed of his bragging, Charles allowed himself to be bowed out of the steamy atmosphere of the chop-house into the evening bustle of the Strand.

By reaching the theatre early, he found a seat in the dress circle, and as he sat there surveying with professional satisfaction the crowded house, he swelled with the sense of his own emancipation and felt extremely happy, although forced on reflection to admit that the presence of a companion to share the evening's pleasure would considerably have added to it.

The bill, consisting of *A Dream of the Future*, *The Duel or my Two Nephews* and *The Country Squire*, was well received, and Charles found all three plays vastly entertaining. He was struck again by the artistry of Mathews, who appeared in widely varying rôles in the two first pieces. Vestris as Honoria Walsingham in *A Dream of the Future*, presented an enchanting appearance, looking at least twenty years younger from behind the footlights, singing with a most tuneful sparkle, and unmistakably retaining her high place in the audience's

affection. In the same piece Charles laughed very heartily at the playing of Mr. Brougham as Patrick, an illiterate Irish footman.

When the play was over Charles walked home; and having nobody with whom to discuss what he had seen, he grew melancholy again and thought longingly of Rose, wondering whether Thomas had succeeded during the day in obtaining any letter or message from her. On reaching Frith Street, he was disappointed to find that the footman had failed in this object, that the maid, Addie, had broken her promise, and that he had, in fact, been unable to catch as much as a glimpse of her.

Charles was so much dashed by this news that he went almost at once to bed, stopping only for a brief conversation with Kitty, who had greeted him with tidings of Jack. She had that day received a letter from her brother and had seen with astonishment that it came from America, to which land of promise, without the preliminary of saying good-bye to his father and sister, Jack O'Brien most unexpectedly had repaired, and from where he contracted with most confident optimism to bring back an immense fortune. But, as he omitted to say either by what means or when, Kitty evinced no great faith in her brother's venture, and was also, as Charles could see, very much distressed at his having gone so far away without first warning her of his intentions. The poor girl had looked ready to cry, and later, when Charles was in bed, he felt some compunction at having made only such a half-hearted attempt to comfort her. His own disappointment and apprehensions about Rose had absorbed his thoughts to the exclusion of everything else.

Before leaving next morning he urged Thomas to return to Hertford Street and to do his utmost to meet Addie, and, having secured the footman's solemn undertaking to do this, Charles went off to the theatre a little cheered. But once more, on arriving there, he was assailed with a sense of isolation and with a painful consciousness of being a misfit in theatrical

surroundings. He overheard snatches of professional chatter, the drift of which was quite foreign to him; watched the company laugh and joke together with easy familiarity, and the frequent use of nicknames and endearments. Mathews glanced up from studying his lines to give Charles a friendly nod, although he hardly appeared conscious of whom he was nodding to, and Vestris, deep in consultation with Vining, did not even observe her new recruit's timid entrance. It seemed to Charles that the very persons who had urged him to go on the stage had now, on his following their advice, almost forgotten his existence; and so, to a certain extent, they had, but through preoccupation merely, and not, as he began to fear, with any deliberate unkindness.

He found the rehearsal more interesting than on the previous day, however, for it proceeded with comparative smoothness and with far fewer interruptions from Mr. Kelly, who now seemed absorbed in spite of himself in the offending part. A pretty young actress called Miss Lee, playing the part of Suzette, did indeed, by becoming hysterical, cause a slight delay; but for no more serious reason than the discovery that her chief costume was to be green. And, on being warmly assured by all the gentlemen present of the exquisite suitability to her hair and complexion of this colour, the young lady composed herself, and continued the rehearsal.

Charles returned home that evening with slightly restored spirits, only to have these damped by the blow that awaited him; Thomas had again been twice to Hertford Street without seeing Addie and had merely succeeded in attracting the displeased attention of Mrs. Clifford's butler.

"If I was you, sir," he advised Charles, "I'd make up my mind to it."

"Make up my mind to what?" Charles asked sharply.

"The hindependence of females," replied Thomas, who meant undependableness.

Charles ordered him to hold his tongue and decided that to-morrow, his attendance not being required at rehearsal

until the afternoon, he would go himself in person to call upon Rose; for it had suddenly occurred to him that there was no real reason as yet why he should not. The Cliffords and the Barons moved in such different social circles that Mrs. Clifford could hardly be acquainted already with the change in his circumstances unless informed of this by Rose, which seemed unlikely. And if still unaware of his new plans, she could scarcely raise any drastic objection to his visiting her daughter—more especially as a call upon ladies who had entertained him was a procedure demanded by etiquette. There would be small hope, Charles knew, of his being permitted to talk to Rose alone, but he could at least tell by her manner how the contents of his letter has been received.

Accordingly, at a little before noon, he set out. In order to arrive at his destination in good trim, he allowed himself the luxury of a hackney cabriolet, which he stopped on being seized with shyness, and alighted from in Curzon Street. He then walked on as calmly as possible, and was overjoyed, on turning into Hertford Street itself, to see a carriage pull up outside the Cliffords' house and Rose, followed by a maid-servant, step out of it. The maid carried a bonnet-box and several other parcels, and the two women, who had evidently been shopping, went indoors.

Delighted at such good fortune, Charles, after waiting a few moments, approached the house boldly and rang the bell.

"Yes, sir," inquired the footman who opened the front door.

Charles asked for Rose. This, as he knew, was hardly the correct course to adopt, but he hoped by following it to have a few words with her privately before Mrs. Clifford was informed of his visit.

"Miss Clifford, sir?" The footman at once looked doubtful and seemed to be studying Charles. "May I have your name, sir?" he asked.

"Mr. Charles Baron."

The servant looked more doubtful than ever. "Miss Clifford is not at home, sir," he said finally after some palpable hesitation.

"But you are mistaken. I saw her leave the carriage not five minutes ago. Will you take up my name, please."

"Well, sir," began the man who had not, or so it seemed, all his wits about him. But just then a repressive voice from inside the hall called out to him. "James."

"Excuse me, sir," the footman mumbled; leaving Charles on the doorstep he retreated, to return almost immediately accompanied by the butler. "This is the gentleman, Mr. Parks," he explained in some confusion.

"Yes, sir?" challenged Parks loftily.

Charles was growing angry. "I wish to see Miss Rose Clifford. This fellow says she is not at home but I know that to be untrue."

"Your name, I understand, is Mr. Charles Baron."

"It is. I have already said so."

"Then I must beg to inform you, sir, that Miss Rose Clifford is not at home."

"But I saw——"

"Miss Clifford is not at home to *you*, sir."

Charles, who had turned very pale, frustrated the butler in the act of closing the door. "By whose instructions?" he demanded.

"By Miss Clifford's own instructions. She is not, nor ever will be, at home to you, sir." Mr. Parks, a man of overbearing character, took much pleasure in adding, "And I would be glad, sir, if you would restrain that—er—fellow of yours from importuning our maidservants." He then closed the door with decision, but not before Charles had seen on the face of James, the footman, an expression of strong commiseration.

Almost too stupefied to think, Charles stood where he was on the doorstep, until, observing a servant girl peer inquisitively up at him from the basement window, the full ignominy of the incident revealed itself. He turned on his heels and walked

away from the house and the neighbourhood at the best pace possible.

This then, was Rose's answer to his pleadings. This her retort to his appeal for sympathy and patience. This the sum total of her protested love. To have the door shut in his face by a lackey; with words that were the purest insult.

Charles was the more wounded because he had, largely owing to her honest confession of weakness, believed what Rose had told him at the ball. He had believed then and had continued until now to believe, that the girl, beneath all her mercenary frivolity, loved him; that she was even ready to love him to the confusion of her worldly desires. At the best, he had trusted his letter to arouse some spark of admiration in her, some zest for adventure that might correspond, though faintly, with his own; and if, at the worst, he had not expected Rose to applaud him, neither had he contemplated so savage and complete a denial. If she could no longer, on account of the step he had taken, offer him love, there had been no need surely to bereave him also of friendship. What he had done might be foolish, but it was not disgraceful. Nor did it merit such a violent repulse.

Following as it did on the sense of failure engendered in Charles by his unfamiliarity with the theatre, he found Rose's treatment of him particularly hard to bear. Had he been able to boast of some success, either personal or professional, in his new life, some justification for his revolt, the fact of having been turned so unceremoniously from the Cliffords' door might have hurt him far less. But as it was, cut off from the more pleasing associations of his home, rejected by Rose and out of place in his new surroundings, Charles felt a complete outcast. He began to wonder whether his choice of the stage had not been the merest folly, and, at the thought that the very servants in Hertford Street knew of his discomfiture, the boy turned hot with shame and dejection. He had no longer, he told himself with great bitterness, a friend in the world.

Having nowhere else to go, he returned languidly to the

O'Briens'; and as he walked along, jostled at times by the passers-by, he regretted with much self-contempt the extravagance that had prompted him to take a cabriolet. How long would the money he had brought from home last him, if he continued to squander it on such trivial luxuries? How in the world was he to live on six shillings a week, or less? And how, without fully meriting scorn, could he permit himself to be supported by Margaret?

Charles had barely entered Frith Street when he saw Thomas, who was out on the pavement looking for him; catching sight of his master the man began to run, and coming up breathlessly to Charles, he exclaimed in evident excitement, "Master Charles, Master Charles, there's a message come for you from the theatre."

"The theatre?" repeated Charles, wondering if he were discharged already, for he did not in his present state of misery think such an occurrence unlikely.

"Yes, indeed, sir. And what a honour! I'll be coming to see you myself, Master Charles. And won't you knock 'em just?" Thomas was red in the face and almost stammering in his agitation.

"What are you talking about," asked Charles, bewildered. But they had by this time reached Number Seventeen and Kitty ran out of the shop to meet them.

She, too, seemed excited, but was able to explain quite coherently, that during Charles's absence, a messenger had come from Madame Vestris, bringing him important news—to wit, that Mr. Brougham, whose playing of the Irish footman in *A Dream of the Future* he had so much admired, had that morning been taken very ill; that no understudy was available and that, as it was the last night of the piece, Madame requested Charles to take Brougham's place and to read his part from the book.

"Who ever heard of such a thing!" added Kitty joyfully. "That a chance to prove yourself should come so quickly! I have the book here for you, Charlie. Madame wishes you to

study the character well and to be at the theatre no later than half-past five."

"And it is one o'clock now," cried Charles, seeing the clock above the counter. "Oh, Kitty, can I learn all those lines in the time?"

"But you haven't got to learn them," she reminded him. "Madame's messenger said most distinctly that you were to read from the book. She will make a speech, no doubt, and ask the indulgence of the audience for you. Such a thing is often done in an emergency."

"Give me the book," replied Charles firmly. "I mean to learn that part."

"Don't be foolish, Charlie. You'll only work yourself into a sad state of anxiety and be too nervous even to *read* correctly. The part is quite a long one. I have been looking at it. There are five lengths at least."

"Give me that book," was Charles's only answer and, taking it from her hand, he went straight upstairs to his bedroom.

"He's lost his wits," exclaimed Kitty. "No one could commit such a part to memory in so few hours."

"Master Charles will. I'll stake my life on it," Thomas retorted proudly. "But we 'ad best leave 'im to 'imself, miss."

"Yes," agreed Kitty, "we had." But not very long afterwards she slipped upstairs and tapped softly on Charles's door.

"Come in," he called out impatiently. Kitty entered, to find him in his shirt sleeves, pacing up and down the room with the book in his hand.

"I tell you I *will* learn it," he assured her, but his voice lacked its former confidence already.

"Very well then," replied Kitty. "If you're so set on it I'll help you. I'll stay here to give you the cues and we'll go over it again and again. It is two o'clock now, which gives us three hours before you need start for the theatre. Do you know any of the lines at all?"

"A little of the first scene, I think," said Charles.

"Give me the book then." And taking this from his hand Kitty perched herself on the end of the bed. "Now for your first line," she went on, giving Charles the cue.

"Ah, that's an easy one," he said. "May I come in, sir?"

"Right. But recollect that Patrick is an Irishman. I'll copy Pa's brogue, and you must try to copy it from me. May I come in, *sor*, is the way that line should be said. And now for the next one. 'Why, you *are* in.' There will be a laugh on that line, Charlie, so don't chip in with yours too quickly. Now, come. 'Why, you *are* in.'"

"So I am, anyhow," said Charles, resuming the part of Patrick.

"Well, and what do you want?" asked Kitty in the character of Mr. Harbottle.

"The young ladies, sir—no, *sor*—desire their compliments——"

"Not compliments. Love."

"The young ladies, *sor*, desire their love to you and say that it's almost ten o'clock, and if you're not ready will you go first and send the carriage back for them."

"Why, Charlie, that's word perfect! And you should get a laugh there yourself, for Patrick has said exactly the opposite of what he means. What a memory you have to be sure."

"Don't stop for compliments, Kitty, pray. We must continue."

And so they did, with many slips and much halting on the part of Charles, and the utmost forbearance on that of Kitty, who played all the other rôles with great gusto, helping Charles over such lines as he found especially difficult by repeating them to him slowly word by word. Nor was Kitty the only member of the household who rallied to the young actor's assistance. Sally brewed him strong coffee in the kitchen and carried several cupfuls of this upstairs; Thomas delayed progress, although with the best intentions, by the occasional application of a wet towel to Charles's head, claiming that this restorative would clear his master's brain; but Charles

except for the trickles of water that ran down his neck, found that the towel made little or no difference to his condition.

Philip O'Brien, who had risen earlier than usual, closed the shop and coming also to Charles's room sat over the fire, drinking gin and water, while he demonstrated the inflections of an Irish brogue.

The three hours passed all too quickly. When Charles, much flustered, left for the theatre, he was accompanied by Kitty, who with her bonnet put on crooked and the book still open in her hand, kept pace beside him, continuing as they went along, to give him the cues and to correct his mistakes; nor did she cease to do this until they arrived at last at the stage-door.

"All the luck in the world to you, dear Charlie," she said fervently as he prepared to go in. Charles was both touched and surprised to see the frankly expressed affection in her eyes.

"You'll do famously, I know it!" Kitty assured him, and with a cheerful wave of her hand, was gone.

After so much flurry, encouragement and exertion, Charles found his matter-of-fact reception by Mr. Vining something of an anti-climax. The manager proposed, it seemed, to take him through the business of the part and as he appeared quite confident that it was to be read, Charles felt it better not to undecieve him; besides being only too glad to retain the precious book in his hands for a little while longer.

Vining's sole comment at the end of over an hour's drilling was by no means a flattering one. "You're not an Irishman, are you?" he inquired as he and Charles left the stage together.

"No, sir."

"I thought not," remarked Vining. "Well, I shouldn't strain after that brogue. It's unconvincing."

Poor Charles was much dashed by this opinion, for he had counted on his colourful imitation of Philip O'Brien's speech to lend the necessary touch of distinction to his performance, and had even pictured Vestris protesting with tears of gratitude

that no actor other than himself should be entrusted in future with an Irish part. It was no use repining, however; Charles went on the manager's instructions to Mr. Brougham's dressing-room where he had been told to array himself in that gentleman's clothes. A Mr. Hughes, the other occupant of the room, proved both kind and encouraging and Charles was assisted in his dressing by an elderly man called Reuben who had been for some years at the Olympic in charge of the wardrobe.

Reuben, unlike Hughes, took a most gloomy view of Charles's undertaking. "I dare say," he remarked as he made some trifling alteration in Patrick's costume, "as 'ow you'll get through it right enough. If you know what I mean. But you can't be expected to give what I term a performance, now, can you?"

"N-no," Charles admitted humbly, "I suppose not."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow," laughed Hughes. "Don't let Reuben alarm you. You'll know him soon enough for what he is—a professional croaker."

"Now that's not 'andsome in you, Mr. 'Ughes," remonstrated the wardrobe master. "Not what I term 'andsome at all." And he added glumly, to Charles, "This 'ere coat's too large for you, young man, too large by miles."

The coat was certainly roomy and even after Reuben had inserted sundry stitches and pleats Charles felt his appearance in the garment to be ridiculous. But Hughes assured him that, the odder his clothes, the more humorous the part would become, and, after some rather casual directions regarding the application of rouge, he left Charles alone with Reuben.

"Ah," remarked that discouraging individual, when the actor had gone, "Mr. 'Ughes ain't troubled by nothing, 'e's not. 'E's what I term 'appy-go-lucky. I'm sorry for you, lad, I am, really. I knowed another young man once what was called on to play a part sudden."

"Indeed," asked Charles, "and did he do well?"

"'E did. In a manner of speaking. He got through

remarkable. But the minute the curtain fell, sir, that poor young fellow fell with it."

"He fell? How?"

"In what I term a fit, lad," explained Reuben with sorrowful enjoyment. "And 'e was never the same afterwards. Never. Gave up the stage altogether, 'e did, and joined an uncle in the fish business. So you see what you're up against, don't you?"

Charles sighed. He was by now fully conscious of the difficult task that lay before him and, not possessing an uncle in the fish business, had no prospect of consolation should his first appearance prove a failure, which Reuben seemed so certain it would, that Charles was sincerely pleased to see the back of him. He would have given a good deal to have had Thomas there, but, for fear of being thought ostentatious or of giving offence, he had refused the man's earnest request to accompany him.

He continued to brood over his words until, on being summoned finally to the stage, he put the book down on the dressing-table and with an air of great resolution followed the boy who had called him.

But, on reaching the wings and peering through them, a sensation of absolute terror took hold of Charles. His hands shook, his legs seemed to give way beneath him. A scene was in progress between three men, Charles Mathews, Mr. F. Matthews, or Matty, and James Vining, the manager's brother. Charles watching their easy movements and hearing the unconcerned way in which their lines were spoken, felt suddenly that he could not go on. Not, at any rate, without the book. And, prompted by a wild impulse to fetch this, he turned round only to be confronted by Vestris.

"The best of success to you, my dear boy," she said very kindly; but on looking at Charles more closely, she exclaimed with dismay, "Your face, child! Do you imagine you are playing a Red Indian?"

Taking a lace-edged handkerchief from her bosom, she scrubbed hastily at Charles's cheeks, succeeding in removing

some, at least, of the rouge which he had applied with untutored prodigality. This operation was barely finished before a voice hissed at him, "There's your cue," and he found himself literally pushed through the door by which he was due to enter.

He was on the stage! A gust of hot air from the footlights seemed almost to strike him. He looked wildly round the set, so brightly lit that it dazzled him; and out towards the audience—a mere dark blur. A voice apparently from nowhere, but in actual fact the prompter's, said something unintelligible. There was a pause which seemed to Charles an eternity, after which, in a voice unrecognisable as his own, he delivered his opening sentence. "May I come in, sir?"

Hardly were these words uttered when Vestris cried out from the wings in audible consternation, "Preserve us! He's forgotten the book!"

This somehow put Charles on his mettle and he spoke without further hesitation his second line, thereby cutting Mr. F. Matthews as Harbottle out of his customary laugh on, "Why, you *are* in!" and throwing all three gentlemen on the stage into temporary confusion. Charles Mathews, the first to recover himself, and with an unmistakable twinkle in his eye, restored the dialogue to order and the scene proceeded.

Charles, aware that the prompter, in his zeal to avoid a catastrophe, would probably officiate whether required to or not, rushed in with his lines, making remarkably few mistakes, and, now that exhilaration had taken the place of fear, even lapsing occasionally into his hastily acquired brogue.

What his fellow actors thought of him he did not pause to consider, although a trifle abashed certainly by the most realistic glare with which Mr. Harbottle delivered the speech—"Go back and say—no stay—you will only make some mistake"—words that seemed almost painfully to the point.

But if Charles's popularity on the stage was in question, there was no doubt whatever that he had captured the sympathies of the audience, who, having been warned that the part of Patrick would be read from the book and seeing the

actor without it, took his effort of memory as a compliment to themselves and greeted his proficiency with tumultuous applause. Clowning can seldom be resisted and Charles, with his capacious suit of clothes, his explosively delivered lines and unique Irish brogue, seemed to the good-humoured house almost as funny as Liston. In Patrick's scene with Mrs. Watson, the lady's maid, he was called upon to embrace her; and having no experience of the discreet simulation of this gesture usually employed by actors, Charles administered such a smacking kiss to the lady's cheek that he startled her thoroughly and called forth a roar of appreciation from the gallery.

In the interval he applied himself once again to the book, which in view of his success with the audience, nobody suggested his taking on with him; and at the final curtain he appeared with the rest, his face redder than ever rouge could make it, his heart beating wildly. His reception was an admirable one although the reiteration of "Bravo, Patrick. Well done, sir!" that came from the back of the pit would have been more gratifying had not Charles so clearly recognised the voice of Thomas. But he was grateful nevertheless that one friend at least had witnessed his maiden performance.

When the curtain fell for the last time Charles found the whole company disposed to praise him; with the single exception, that is, of Mr. William Vining who stood apart from the others looking thoughtful. Vestris called Charles a dear, clever boy; Mathews declared young Barty to be a natural comedian of rare quality. F. Matthews (Mr. Harbottle), forgetting apparently the theft of his laugh, clapped Charles upon the shoulder; Mr. Kelly remarked without undue resentment that it was the part which made the actor; Hughes and James Vining joined in friendly congratulation. Miss Murray who, as the maid, had been so realistically embraced, professed to have enjoyed the experience and Miss Lee smiled at Charles so sweetly that he quite lost his heart to her. But still Mr. Vining in spite of the questioning glance Charles gave him, said nothing.

Reuben, hovering in the background, and evidently disappointed to see Charles none the worse for his experience, remarked that the performance had been well enough considering; but that the young man would find what he termed a difference when, and if, he took up acting in real earnest. A comment which fell far below the general level of kindness.

At the very end Mr. Vining offered his contribution; coming as it were out of a brown study the manager walked very deliberately over to Charles.

"I think," he said, speaking slowly, as if the words hurt him, "I think, Mr. Baron, that we *might* make it a guinea."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A Celebration

WHEN Charles went to change his clothes he found the dressing-room empty; Mr. Hughes, who was appearing in the second piece, had gone to the wings already; and Charles regretted his absence. He felt so talkative now that his ordeal on the stage was over that he would have welcomed even the pessimistic discourse of Reuben, and wishing that there might have been visitors for him to entertain in the Green Room, he was faced with the thought that no friend or relation had been present to witness his performance. This saddened Charles, until he remembered Thomas, and hurried through his dressing, pleasantly positive that the man would be waiting outside for him.

But there was no one waiting; nor, according to Tim, the doorkeeper, had there been any inquiry for Mr. Baron whatever. Charles, very crestfallen, and supposing that Thomas had been unable to tear himself away before the end of the bill, walked disconsolately out of the courtyard. He meditated a return to the theatre to seek companionship in the Green Room and, as he paused to consider this plan, observed a woman come hurrying towards him.

It was Kitty.

"Oh, Charlie," she exclaimed, "how glad I am not to have missed you. How did it go? Did you remember your lines? Did you get the right laughs? Were you applauded?"

"Then you were not in front?" asked Charles, who had hoped on seeing her that she might have been.

"No, more's the pity. And I'll tell you why in a minute. But I *must* know first what happened."

"It was well enough," Charles told her modestly. "I

remembered most of the part, I think, or if I forgot it, no one appeared to notice."

"And the audience?"

"They seemed to like me. There was a great deal of laughter."

"Ah, Charlie, that's capital. But I knew how it would be. And Madame? What had she to say to you?"

"She was kindness itself and so was Mr. Mathews. Indeed, every one was kind. And Kitty, what do you think? I am to be paid a guinea. A guinea a week." Charles was glad now that he had never mentioned to her the original degrading suggestion of one shilling per night.

"That's fine for a beginning," Kitty said warmly, "and you'll be earning five times that amount soon, I'll warrant. And now I must tell you why I was obliged to stay away. It was on account of Pa."

"What was the matter?"

"He was excited over you, I think, Charlie; and while I was out he finished the bottle of gin and compelled Sally to go out for another. And gin is a miserable drink, as you know."

"Yes, indeed," Charles agreed as wisely as though he were not a total stranger to this saddening spirit.

"Well," Kitty continued. "Poor Pa cried a great deal and was altogether so wretched that I put him to bed. And then, as you'll understand, I did not care to leave him. Thomas offered to stay instead of me, but I knew the good creature's heart would break if he missed seeing your first appearance."

"Where is Thomas now?" Charles asked.

"We arranged that directly your piece was over he should return to Frith Street so that I might come here to meet you. I thought," Kitty explained a little timidly, "that you might be pleased to find a friend waiting."

"Pleased?" Charles repeated with grateful emphasis. "I was overjoyed. What should I do without you, Kitty?"

"That's nonsense, for I indulged myself by coming. Pa was in such a heavy sleep that I even slipped away without

waiting for Thomas. But he is doubtless there by now, and will keep Sally company until we are home. Come, Charlie, let us walk back slowly and you shall tell everything that happened."

"I'll do that with pleasure, but we will not walk home just yet. Let us go to some nice place and have supper."

"Good gracious, Charlie, we'll do no such thing! A guinea a week won't run to such notions. I have something tasty for you at home though, for I knew you would be hungry."

"I am," said Charles, "I'm very hungry indeed. But your tasty supper must keep, Kitty. For you and I must celebrate."

Kitty started to protest, but he cut her short. "This is a very important occasion," he urged. "I can never make a *first* appearance on the stage again. Now come, dear, you can't refuse me."

"Well," she admitted, smiling and by no means averse herself from a little celebration, "perhaps I can't. But it's a sad extravagance, you rash boy. Where shall we go to?"

This was something of a poser, for Charles's knowledge of the night-life of London was non-existent—and yet, was it? No, not entirely. He suddenly remembered the *Theatrical Observer* and its informative contributor, Mr. Paul Pry.

"We'll go to Bretts," he said, speaking as nonchalantly as he knew how to.

"Very well," acquiesced Kitty with the most flattering docility.

Charles, feeling the complete man of the world, offered her his arm; but they were arrested on starting to walk away by the sound of a voice that called out loudly, "Young man. Young man. I wish to speak to you."

It was the old singing master, Arletti, who, still wearing the long black coat which so effectively concealed his linen or the lack of it, came hurrying up to them.

"Young man," he addressed Charles, speaking reproachfully; "you have never given me that information."

"Information? I don't understand you, sir."

"You cannot surely have forgotten. I asked you to ascertain the hour of your birth. The exact hour. I cannot cast your horoscope satisfactorily without it."

Charles felt ready to laugh at such absurdity; superstition might not be so wrong as he had been taught to believe, but it was undoubtedly ridiculous.

"I am afraid," he told Arletti civilly enough, "that I don't know the hour. Nor can I find it out now—for various reasons. And besides, I do not really want my horoscope cast at all."

"Not want it cast?" repeated Arletti incredulously. "But that is folly, young man. Wanton folly. It is essential to know what the stars have in store for you."

"The fault, dear Brutus," murmured Charles sententiously.

But Kitty now joined in the conversation, saying with great decision, "This gentleman is right, Charlie. Your horoscope may show great things. Do let him cast it, pray."

"You believe in such fancies?" Charles asked her; he had narrowly escaped saying, "In such nonsense."

"Indeed I do." Kitty's answer held the ring of conviction.

"The young lady is wise," Arletti said, "and I shall cast the horoscope with the bare information I have if only to please her. It will be ready in two days' time, young man. And perhaps, my dear," he added slyly to Kitty, "*his* stars will have something to tell me about *you*."

"La, sir, I am quite sure they will not!" But Kitty blushed hotly as she spoke and was glad that this betrayal of her feelings went unobserved in the darkness.

Arletti, now that he had achieved his purpose, and after giving them a muttered good-night, returned to the theatre.

"It is all rubbish," exclaimed Charles emphatically, when the astrologer was out of earshot.

Kitty shook her head; but not wishing to argue the point she suggested their making a start in search of supper.

They had not far to go, for Bretts was in Drury Lane. It was not a fashionable resort, although popular enough with actors and with the more middle-class members of their

audiences, and Charles was a little taken aback on entering, by the hot, smoky atmosphere, and by the loud talk and laughter which greeted him. With an uncomfortable flash of imagination he visualised Rose in such surroundings and was appalled at the mere idea.

But Kitty seemed quite composed. She entered Bretts as if well used to such places and surveyed the wine room and its occupants with a coolness that was almost bold. Charles noticed that there were very few women present and that the men, or some of them, eyed his companion with an impudent admiration. Kitty looked undeniably handsome. Her dress, if gaudy in trimming and colour, became her well; so did the rakish, over-feathered bonnet. Her eyes were bright with excitement; her bearing debonair. Charles, walking behind her watching the careless grace of her carriage, forgot his distaste for Bretts in the pleasure of being seen out with such a fine young woman.

Kitty made her way to one of the few vacant tables, and caught without seeming to, a waiter's eye; while anxious that Charles should believe himself capable of playing the host, she knew that in such a place so young and inexperienced a man might suffer from very indifferent service. Her ruse succeeded so well, that by the time she and Charles were seated, the waiter had already come up to take their order.

Kitty, in the pursuit of economy, professed a desire for tripe and porter, but Charles, as she soon discovered, had far more exalted ideas.

"This isn't only a meal, remember," he pointed out. "It's a celebration, and I think we should have champagne."

The waiter's face brightened.

"No, Charlie," Kitty said decidedly. "We will have nothing of the sort. I—I don't like champagne."

"Nonsense." Charles had never himself tasted this luxurious wine, but he clearly associated it with night-life, theatrical triumphs and celebrations. "Bring some champagne," he said with great dignity to the waiter.

"Certainly, sir. But, if I might make so bold, tripe does not—er—exactly—well, sir, it 'ardly *blends* with champagne, now do it?"

"No, no, you are right, I think," Charles concurred hastily. "We will have two beefsteaks instead, and see to it that they are not overdone."

"Certainly, sir. We serves our beefsteaks with tomatoes and potatoes, freshly fried."

"That will do very well, eh, Kitty?"

"Yes, if you say so. But I would rather——"

Charles interrupted her by saying to the waiter, "That is settled then. And bring the wine quickly."

"Very good, sir. What brand would you be wanting, sir? We 'ave Perrier Jouet or Giesler. Which shall I bring, sir?"

"The best," Charles told him simply. And the man, grinning, hurried away.

Kitty, dismayed at such prodigality, still lacked the heart to scold, and, on seeing Charles's delight when the waiter did indeed bring the best champagne, she was glad she had held her tongue.

The wine, light though heady, soon induced in Charles a state of high exhilaration and before half an hour had passed he had mapped out for himself a career, which was to lead in an astonishingly short space of time from minor parts at the Olympic to Shakesperian leads at Drury Lane. Having got so far he ordered another bottle of champagne.

"You will be drunk, child," prophesied Kitty, but with no very great firmness. She, too, was exhilarated by the wine, and recklessness came easily to her.

"Why do you call me child?" asked Charles a little fretfully. "I am not so much younger than you are."

"A whole six years, Charlie," Kitty answered sadly. Charles lifted her hand and kissed it.

The second bottle of champagne arrived, and was on the whole a redundant, for it soon transformed Charles's gaiety into a kind of incoherent defiance.

"I tell you, Kitty, I don't care," he proclaimed loudly, leaning across the table.

"Don't care for what, Charlie?" she asked, remarking anxiously how flushed his face was.

"I don't care for anything. Not for Rose even. She may reject me if she chooses. What do women signify when a man has work to do?"

At the name of Rose, Kitty pricked up her ears. Charles, she believed, was speaking of the girl he loved; and speaking of her in a way that indicated there had been a quarrel. Kitty felt strongly tempted to encourage him to go on; for she had a keen desire to know how things stood between him and this Rose. And what type of girl it was who had engaged his affections. But she did not encourage him. She believed that Charles, when sober, would never think of discussing his love affair with her, or of telling tales of another woman; and Kitty's sense of fair play forbade her to force his confidence now when he was so very nearly drunk.

She checked any further revelations by feigning fatigue and by telling Charles he had better call for the bill, which, when it was brought, horrified her by its dimensions. The champagne, as she had feared, was eleven shillings a bottle. Charles, quite unmoved, settled in a lordly way, making an extravagant addition for the pocket of the waiter. He then rose a trifle cautiously from the table. The room displayed a strong tendency to revolve and the delighted countenance of the waiter seemed now to advance upon him, now to retreat into a mist. Poor Charles, if not quite drunk, was far from sober.

Kitty, as discreetly as possible, put her hand on his elbow and steered him through the crowded room towards the door. And, as they passed, a man at one of the tables leered up at her. "Haven't I seen you before, pretty one?" he asked jocosely.

Kitty took no notice but Charles hearing the words, stopped dead. "How dare you address this lady?" he demanded, glaring at the offender.

"Lady?" repeated the man contemptuously. "That's a good one. Whoever saw a *lady* in such a place as this?"

Charles's flushed face went white; clenching his fist and moving with the deliberate carefulness of the semi-inebriated, he advanced on the speaker. "Take that back," he said fiercely. "Take that back, will you, you insolent lout?"

Kitty caught his arm. As she endeavoured to pull him away, the waiter who had served them came to her assistance; a timely act of chivalry, for it was easy enough for the two of them to remove Charles from the scene of the disturbance and into the street. The boy was a great deal too fuddled and unsteady to put up any serious resistance, and the waiter was well-versed in the art of ejection. But, as if recollecting Charles's generous gratuity, he handled the giver of it gently.

"Not much more than a babby, the young gent isn't," he murmured sympathetically to Kitty, who thanked him and led Charles away. They would be obliged to walk home, but having learned in a hard school the best manner of treating the intoxicated, she knew this exercise would do him less harm than good.

Now that the cool night air was blowing against his face, Charles felt less dizzy and he was conscious on coming a little more to himself of the most acute shame and distress.

"Oh, Kitty," he pleaded piteously, "will you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you, Charlie? Why, whatever for?"

"For taking you to such a place. I had no idea. You heard what that vile fellow said?"

"He was quite right," retorted Kitty placidly, "I am not a lady."

"You are, you're a very great lady, Kitty. Just let go of my arm, will you, and I'll go back and settle with the black-guard?" Charles stopped at a street corner, disposed once again to be truculent.

"Now, Charlie, don't be foolish. The man was drunk and meant no real harm, I'm sure. Come, child, and don't argue.

Words hurt no one and you wouldn't like to be mixed up in a brawl, would you? You might end up before the magistrate, which would vex Madame Vestris mightily. Now be a good boy, do."

With these and other persuasions, Kitty did in the end induce Charles to walk home quietly with her, but he remained in considerable distress of mind and touched her very deeply by the indignation which he displayed on her account. Just as if, she thought a little sadly, it was the first time some half-drunken fellow had insulted her. For Kitty in her time had been no stranger to far less reputable haunts than Bretts.

They made slow progress and found, on reaching home at last, that Sally had gone to bed while Thomas lay fast asleep upon the parlour sofa, his head shaded by the ferns and his feet guarded by Lawrence, who as the only waking occupant of Number Seventeen, kept stately watch from the end of the couch.

Charles, on seeing how faithfully Thomas had kept vigil, and observing upon the table the preparations for a festive supper, inclined to be tearful, but, agreeing with Kitty not to disturb the faithful servant, he obeyed her injunctions to himself by going upstairs. She came shortly afterwards to his room where he lay stretched out on the bed, still dressed save for his coat, cravat and waistcoat, with his eyes strangely brilliant and his hair disordered.

"Here's some hot tea for you, Charlie," Kitty said. She put the cup on the bedside table, and looking down at Charles, indulged herself by pushing the tumbled hair back from his forehead. Her touch was gentle and Charles caught at her hand.

"Kitty," he said huskily. "You're so kind, Kitty."

"Drink that tea, child, it will steady you." She spoke soothingly and attempted to free her hand.

"Stop calling me child. Stop it, I say." Charles with a force that matched his words pulled her on to the bed. With his arms about her, he kissed her, roughly at first, then with a wild tenderness, on the mouth.

As Kitty relaxed against him, yielding to his kiss, he felt for the first time the strength of genuine passion, the full urge of that unselective, unreasoning impulse men call desire, compared to which, had he stopped to recall them, his passages with Rose would have seemed childish and trifling. But Charles recalled nothing; nor did he fully explore his belief that Kitty, in spite of his angry contradiction of the man at Bretts, would not resist him. And yet, even more greatly to her own surprise than his, she did. Kitty, who all the evening had longed to feel the boy's arms about her, longed to press her lips to his and be possessed by him, resisted. She took one kiss, savoured the full sweet ecstasy of it, and slipped from his embrace.

"No, Charlie, not to-night," she told him softly. "Perhaps never. But above all, not to-night."

Charles gazed up at her from where he lay. He saw the pretty disarrangement of her hair; the languor in her eyes; the full curve of her breasts that was accentuated by her gown.

"Kitty!" he cried hoarsely, raising himself a little.

She shook her head, holding her hand out as if to ward him off. "You don't know what you're doing, child," she said, and her voice was weary. "You don't love me."

Charles, about to contradict this, stared stupidly up at her instead.

"I—I feel so very strange," he faltered as a wave of dizziness engulfed him. He was bereft of all his masterful manliness now.

"Poor boy. Lie still while I fetch you some water." Kitty went to the washstand, returning with a glass full, and a towel which she had soaked in the ewer.

"Drink this, Charlie," she said gently, "and I will cool your forehead." She sat down again upon the bed.

The water was comforting, so was the wet towel on Charles's hot forehead. He lay quite still; so exhausted suddenly that all desire had left him. He smiled weakly at Kitty and she took his hand.

"There, there," she said, speaking as he had heard her do to her father. "You will feel better soon. You had eaten nothing since breakfast and were so overexcited. That is why the champagne seemed too strong for you."

Charles smiled again. It was very sweet of her, he thought, to put this kindly construction on his inability to stand up to wine. Kitty mixed no reproaches with her ministrations as Margaret would have done. Wryly, Charles thought of Rose, and the disgust his condition would have aroused in her. His hand tightened on Kitty's; but he did not speak. He was beginning to feel so drowsy. He stirred a little, drew closer to her and almost immediately was fast asleep.

Even when his grip on her hand slackened, Kitty stayed where she was. The fire grew black, the candles burned down and guttered, and when the dawn crept greyly through the windows, Kitty still watched beside Charles. Her back ached, her eyes tingled with a longing for sleep. She even dozed a little. But she would not leave him.

And it was fully morning before the tired girl crept away.

INTERLUDE

Her Majesty's Mails

EXTRACT from a letter to Rose Clifford from her cousin, Mary Priscilla Ellesmere.

Longdale, November 19th, 1837.

. . . We were all most shocked to hear of Charles Baron's having run away from home and gone on the stage. Or at least we *should* be shocked. I, for one, cannot help but admire his adventurous spirit, although to become an actor is certainly irreligious and Charles's behaviour must have been a painful blow to poor Cousin Margaret. But this is doubtless stale news, Rose. Charles will have been especially eager to tell *thee* of his new project, and I can only hope that thee will seek to influence him wisely. . .

From Charles Baron to Daniel Ellesmere.

17 Frith Street, Soho.

January 3, 1838.

DEAR DANIEL,—I write once again that you may have news of me to pass on to my sister. It was indeed a strange sensation to spend Christmas Day away from home, but my friends here were very kind, and on New Year's Eve Madame Vestris was so obliging as to invite me to a supper-party.

Pray, tell Margaret that I am well and have not been so mistaken as she feared in my choice of a profession. My part in this Christmas piece is really a good one and Madame V. expresses herself well satisfied. I am not yet earning enough, alas, to dispense with my sister's generosity, much though, I wish to do so. An actor's life is, I must confess it, a costly one.

The letter bringing me your Christmas wishes was exceedingly welcome and I appreciate it the more from knowing that you, like the rest of the family, disapprove of my way of life. But you are most generous in setting your disapproval on one side and in asking me to visit you. This I will gladly do when once assured that your reception of me will not involve you in any inconvenience or discussion.

Please convey my dear love to Margaret and tell William John that I miss him greatly.

And believe me, dear Daniel,

Very gratefully yours,

CHARLES BARON.

PS. Pray, tell Margaret that I have decided to adopt the *alias* of Barty for professional use. Although at first a mere nickname given me in jest by Mr. Mathews, it will serve well enough and will prevent any "disrepute" attaching to the immaculate surname of Baron. Charles, I beg to retain!

From Daniel Elsemere to Margaret Baron.

Bishopsgate Street,

April 3, 1838.

DEAR COUSIN,—I cannot, I fear, accede to your request that I should allow thee to meet Charles under my roof. Such a course would be deceitful in the extreme. And though I will say quite frankly that such methods as thy father employs breed deceit in those about him, I would not willingly encourage this—least of all in thee. And I must remind thee, Cousin, that this separation from Charles has come about through thy own weakness, or shall I call it strength? Poor Margaret! Thee has had some hard choices to make and God only can tell whether thee has chosen right. But enough of that.

In taking advantage of my Cousin Baron's absence from London to write this, I am myself behaving in an underhand

manner. But since I must refuse thy main request it seems only compassionate to grant thee some recent news of Charles. Thy brother visited us only yesterday and I can give thee an excellent account of him. His health is good, his manner more sensible and mature than formerly, and, although I cannot alter my fixed opinion of the Stage, I can say truly that it has in no sense as yet corrupted Charles. He progresses well at the theatre and will go, he tells me, during the summer months to gain further experience in the provinces. I believe to Yorkshire.

I must hastily relieve thy anxiety with regard to Madame Vestris. Not only is Charles's attitude towards this lady merely one of respect, gratitude and admiration, but she is shortly expected, so he informs me, to marry the actor, Mr. Mathews, of whose good qualities thy brother speaks so warmly. There is no doubt in my mind that these people have been excellent friends to him.

So, my dear Margaret, please set thy mind at rest. And listen furthermore to this mild enough piece of advice. Charles certainly has no amorous feelings for Madame Vestris and may, for all I know to the contrary, be fancy free. But this is his own business, not mine nor even his loving sister's. The boy is handsome; he has an engaging charm about him and is living in a world of careless morals. And we should not let any probable attachment concern *us*. Better far to let Charles sow what wild oats he must, than, by probing too closely into his secrets, destroy his confidence in the few serious friends that he has. It is fruitless now to lament the path he has chosen, but let us at least refrain from a too apparent curiosity as to his doings.

With regard to thy brother's finances, he would be hard put to it to maintain himself without thy help. But he assures me that he does not spend *all* thee allows him, and that he is putting by as much as possible in order to return it to thee. And I believe him, for the boy is honourable.

I have been much troubled for the past few weeks on

account of Catherine's health, but I trust that she will soon be recovered and able to go as usual to Longdale. The children beg me to send their kisses.

Thy affectionate cousin,

DANIEL ELLESMERE.

From Mrs. Mary Clifford to Sir Harry Tempest Bart.

Hertford Street,

June 15th, 1838.

MY DEAR SIR HARRY,—A London Season without you! Sad indeed! And I have the added discomfiture of knowing the responsibility for your departure to the Continent lay at my wilful girl's door. But when you return to England, if no French or Italian enchantress has ensnared your heart in the meantime, you will, I am positive, find Rose of a very different way of thinking.

You were a foolish fellow to ignore my warnings and to press your suit at a time when the silly child still dwelt upon that trivial attachment which I spoke of. You and I, as people of the world, know how unimportant such things are and yet how they can be magnified in the eyes of innocence and youth. The little deception, of which I thought it wise to tell you, has worked excellently, for Rose believed at the time, and now believes even more firmly, that the young man has voluntarily abandoned her. She might indeed have accepted your proposal through pique, and, this being so, I can only be thankful that she refused you. For Rose should, and will, have, I vow, a far better reason for becoming your wife. She will marry you for love.

At present, having recovered altogether from her folly, she is as vivacious as a butterfly and I must add, at the risk of seeming biassed, in very great beauty. She has been asked for by Lord Derehaven and has refused him. And in truth a widower of sixty odd could hardly have been tempting. The old man has taken it much to heart and there remain other admirers in plenty. But my Rose holds herself aloof and

perhaps you, as well as I, can guess the reason. The summer's gaiety begins to weary her and she will be all the readier, therefore, to seek the haven of marriage and a good man's love.

To show you her indifference to that foolish Baron boy, I must tell you that she refused recently to accompany a party to the Olympic Theatre, and in such a manner as to show that the subject had no further interest for her. I went myself, out of curiosity I confess, and was very well entertained—as I am always by Vestris, although she is showing signs of being past her prime. How these play-actresses do persevere with their girlish antics! I must admit that our young man, who now calls himself Charles Barty, did prettily in a small part, and when I think of that overbearing, strait-laced Quaker, his father, I cannot but feel vastly amused. But I am most relieved to know that Baron—or *Barty*—will trouble us no more.

I observed Count d'Orsay at the theatre with the Blessington woman and was hard put to it how to acknowledge him without seeming to bow at *her*—the more so, as I was with Lady Haversham, who is so very *comme il faut*. The Count, however, no doubt to spare my embarrassment, appeared not to know me. What tact these Frenchmen have!

And now, dear Sir Harry, you must acknowledge that I have kept to my bargain. I have furthered your cause discreetly and have reported progress. And I can assure you that the field is clear, Rose a very much wiser young woman and my own preference for you as a son-in-law unaltered. Your absence is a prudent move, but do not prolong it unduly. For my little daughter is a candle that draws many moths.

And pray, consider me always,

Your sincere friend,

MARY CLIFFORD.

Charles Baron to Kitty O'Brien.

Leeds, July 21st, 1838.

MY DEAREST KITTY,—And so Madame Vestris has become Mrs. Charles Mathews. I am delighted to hear it, for two more

delightful persons than herself and her husband, it would be hard to find. There will be ill-natured comments, I suppose, about the difference in their ages. But why? Madame is but six years older than Mathews and this, to my way of thinking, is an admirable circumstance. A woman who is six years older than her husband can indulge and mother him. And what is more delightful than that, eh, Kitty?

I am a little disconsolate that Mr. and Mrs. Mathews are to go to America though I am sure their progress there will be a triumph. Mr. Planché is to undertake the direction during their absence and he is certainly both gifted and agreeable; yet, I fear the Olympic will seem but half-alive without Madame to inspire us. How fond I am of the little theatre and how often since coming to Yorkshire have I congratulated myself on having such surroundings to return to. Conditions in Wych Street are superlative compared to the theatres round and about York. I am not complaining, Kitty, far from it; for I am very well amused, and find the Wilkinson brothers pleasant enough fellows to work for, although I could wish they had some of the interesting eccentricities of their late father, of whom Charles Mathews, from recollections of *his* father's, has told me so much.

Gone, too, is Johnny Winter, that famous character who acted for many years as wardrobe-keeper and tailor and who ruled the company and even Tate Wilkinson himself with a rod of iron. It was Winter who on one occasion refused to supply the late Mr. Mathews with a bishop's costume on the grounds that such dignitaries should not exist, and who, in an unshakable belief that Shakespeare still lived, inveighed against the Bard thus—"Eh! It's more of that fond Shakespeare's stuff. I wish he was drowned i' t'river Ouse. I shall have no peace while he's alive, I see. What with his *Henry t' Eighth* and *Perouse* and *Pizarro* and *Robinson Crusoe* and *Coriolanus* and his *Jubilee* and such fond stuff, I'd better be a galley slave, I's sure. Damn the chap! Why doesn't he get his bread by some honest trade, or if he must write plays, why can't he write 'em without so

money folk in 'em? He niver thinks of the trooble he gives to t' poor tailors and wardrobe-keepers."¹

Winter, you will admit, was even more severe than our good Reuben is! But one of his foibles I do indeed concur in—namely, a hatred of Leeds. We are there at present as you see and what a grim, unlovely town it is. Worse still, its inhabitants abominate actors—or “lakers” as we are called in this part of the country—and hold the theatrical profession in the lowest possible esteem. Insults are called after us in the street and the audiences are so noisy and inattentive that only the broadest of comedians can be sure of holding his own against them. I am told that even Mrs. Siddons, when playing in Leeds, was subjected to every kind of discourtesy and interruption; so much so, that when the curtain fell after her final appearance there, she raised her clenched fists to heaven, and cried out—“Farewell, ye brutes, and for ever, I trust; ye shall never torture me again, be assured!”

Miss Greene, the young lady whom I have mentioned to you before, had a shocking experience yesterday when walking to the theatre for a rehearsal. Some rough-looking men recognised her and not only pursued and insulted her, but threatened to duck her in the river. And for no worse crime than that of being a “laker!” Most fortunately Thomas and I chanced to pass and my knuckles are still sore from the blow I managed to inflict on one ruffian's chin. The others, being cowards as most bullies are, took to their heels at once. Poor Miss Greene. She is a very charming girl and behaved with the utmost courage and good sense. But we shall all of us be glad to bid farewell to the “brutes” and pass on to Hull where “laker” is a term of approbation and not of abuse.

As to parts I have been tolerably lucky. Changes in the company and a case or two of illness have given me better opportunities than I dared to hope for. So far, I have succeeded best with Tony Lumpkin and was actually called for! They gave me Lord Duberley in *The Heir at Law*, and I made a sad

¹Taken from *The Life of Charles Mathews the Elder*, by Mrs. Mathews.

mess of it—to make up as an old man is one thing, but to speak and move as such *convincingly* is quite another. I was a dire failure as Duberley and could only console myself that this inability to present old age saved me from Friar Lawrence and secured me Mercutio instead. Would it had been Romeo. Oh, Kitty, how I long for that part! Our impetuous lover here was close on fifty and at the second performance was intoxicated which led to much apprehensiveness during the balcony scene. All was well, however, although I could not but pity poor Juliet. Miss Greene played the part with great sweetness.

In *The Critic* I drew Puff. I may, or may not, have done well, but no one could judge, for the piece was given here in Leeds and a riot broke out in the theatre, which started in the gallery as a private dispute between two croppers and ended in a general display of hostility towards the unfortunate actors.

I am at liberty this evening as they play *The Castle Spectre*, in which I have no part, and before beginning this letter to you I finished the most recent number of *Nicholas Nickleby*, which I will send on to you as before in the hope you may enjoy it as heartily as I did. What a joy Mr. Crummles is. I can assure you that the proceedings here are most similar at times to those which Mr. Dickens describes and just as ludicrous. We have no Infant Phenomenon, however, more's the pity. I would sooner read C. D. than any author living.

Pray, write to me soon, Kitty. Do you miss me? I am selfish enough to hope so, for I certainly miss you. How is your father? Please give him my sincere respects.

And believe me to be always,

Your grateful and affectionate friend,

CHARLIE.

Kitty O'Brien to Charles Baron.

17 Frith Street, July 29, 1838.

It was a great joy, dear Charlie, to receive your welcome and merry letter, and to know that you are so well and are gaining such useful experience. But I am most thankful to

know that you are leaving Leeds. Pray, do not engage again in any street brawls even to protect a lady.

I sent a very trifling wedding gift to Madame Vestris, or I should say to Mrs. Charles Mathews, and got the kindest of letters possible in return. What a delightful woman she is and how cordial she has been, not only to you, Charlie, but to your friends as well. I hope that she will be very happy in her marriage and feel sure that she will be. Mr. Mathews is such a gentleman. I agree with you that six years difference in age need make very little difference, not at least in the case of people who are in the position to *marry*!

It is very sweet to know that you miss me. And how can you be so silly as to ask if I miss you? You must know that I do and how greatly. Tell me more of Miss Greene. She sounds most fascinating. I do not suppose that Lord Duberley was near as bad as you fear. You are too modest.

Poor Pa has been very troublesome, I think on account of his fretting for you. Often when you were here, he has stayed in to talk and play to you, when he might otherwise have been out drinking. And, now that there is no attraction to keep him indoors, he is almost never sober. I try to reason with him, but he doesn't seem to listen. Worse than that, his health has been poorly and last week I was obliged to call in a doctor. But I might have saved myself the expense for he can do nothing to help Pa unless he stops drinking.

I have nothing entertaining to tell you, dear, for the house is dull without you and the weather very sultry. I don't go out often and miss those pleasant meetings with you after the play. How glad I shall be when the Olympic opens again.

Sally sighs after Thomas and begs me to send him her regards. She would write him a letter, I am sure, but the poor girl don't know how to.

And now, dear Charlie, I must end. Write soon again,
to your devoted well-wisher,

KITTY.

I am delighted with the new *Nickleby*.

Thomas Ford to Sally Martin.

Leeds, August 8, 1838.

DEAR MISS SALLY,—You wil be pleased to ear that we do wel Master Charles is in splendid ealth and is wel-liked even in this barbarious town of Leeds where actors is dirt if you can beleeve it I could wish we was in London for many reasons one of them you can guess you dont need to worry about that stuck-up thing Miss Betty Opkins because the last time I see her she went to scratch my eyes out and behaved most ungenteel and if she should grimace at you in the street you should treat er with the disrespeck she deserves I may ave been a filanderer in my time Sally but I swear on my eart that I now nows true love when I see it no more for the present as Master Charles suits must be pressed I send my respecks to Miss Kitty and the old gent and opes he is conducting imself more sober I was glad to get your mesage I can tell you

From your friend THOMAS FORD
this is pretty its from Shaksper—

“See, ow she leans er cheek upon er and!
O, that I were a glove upon that and
That I might touch that cheek!”

Romeo said this and I can well henter into is feelings.

Extract from a letter written by Rose Clifford and subsequently torn up by the writer.

I am at Longdale, Charles, and there are memories of you everywhere. Why did you never write to me or tell me one word of your intentions? Is it possible that you did write and that the letter went astray? When I recall what you said to me here in the orchard, and later at the ball before Mamma interrupted us, I cannot credit that you should have gone from me so completely. Were you perhaps ashamed of what you have done? I think you have been most wild and imprudent, but I should not have been unkind. As I tried to explain to you once,

wealth and an assured position mean a *great* deal to me, yet now that I have not seen you for so long, dear Charles, I begin to wonder if they still mean as much. I cannot always answer this question myself, but I have learned through all these sad months of silence that I love you. I—

Margaret Baron to Daniel Ellesmere.

Bryanston Square.

Oct. 2, 1838.

MY DEAR COUSIN DANIEL,—I had hoped to visit thee yesterday to obtain further news of Charles. But my step-mother is very far from well and this time her indisposition seems serious, not as is so often the case, imaginary. So I send thee this by William John and beg that thee will post him well as to Charles's doings. How good thee has been to the boy and how I honour thee for it.

Since I saw thee last, Janey has become engaged to be married. She was proposed to and has accepted William Burton who once honoured me by a similar suggestion. Not a romantic choice, thee will agree, but she longed to be married and I hope that a home and children may sweeten her disposition. The date of the wedding must be left unsettled until we see how my stepmother progresses.

Pray, let me know if Charles has mentioned Rose Clifford, for, from the covert inquiries she made regarding him at Longdale, I have had some fears in that quarter. Thee will chide me for this I know. But the mere thought of any alliance between my brother and that selfish, trumpery girl alarms me, although her own cold-hearted worldliness is no doubt a sufficient safeguard against it.

How are thy children? Thee must let them come here again as soon as Mrs. Baron is recovered for, with all thy kindness, a motherless home must be a sad one.

My grateful regards to thee, dear cousin.

MARGARET.

Sir Harry Tempest, Bart., to Mrs. Mary Clifford.

Naples, October 17th.

MY DEAR MADAM,—Being heartily sick of what passes on the Continent for cookery, and desirous not to miss the hunting at Melton, I am on my way home. Miss Rose may be interested to hear this, or again she may not. We shall see.

Pray accept my sincere respects,

HARRY TEMPEST.

Extract from the *Theatrical Observer*.

November, 1838.

We are sorry to hear that Madame Vestris and her husband have made a comparative failure in America and a gentleman recently arrived from New York states that the Park Theatre will hold £400, but that the receipts the night of their first appearance did not amount to that sum and on the second night they fell to £250.

During the remainder of the twelve nights at New York the fluctuation was considerable, but the receipts so generally decreased until at last they were scarcely above expenses.

1838

CHAPTER TWENTY

Mistletoe

DECEMBER the twenty-fifth, eighteen thirty-eight.

Kitty's preparations for this, Charles's second Christmas at Frith Street, were of a most joyous nature; she had, it was true, little money to spend, but she could add to this the value of a steadily increasing affection. Perhaps Charles's absence during the summer had warmed a heart that had small need of it; perhaps his references, while in Yorkshire, to the fascinating Miss Greene had troubled Kitty, who, if strong enough to refuse herself to Charles, could not wholly refrain from jealousy of other women.

Kitty may also have noticed, since his return to London, that Charles seemed less dependent on her, that his circle of acquaintances had widened and that he was invited out more often to dine and to supper. She may have noticed too, that he was gaining, not only in theatrical experience but in knowledge of the world, that his good looks and good humour brought him popularity and that his diffidence was decreasing. And, noting these changes, she may have grown a little wistful.

But, if this were so, she concealed her anxiety. Charles was her especial charge and care, and Kitty most artfully pretended to rejoice at his increasing self-sufficiency. Never by word or look did she indicate to him that she felt herself at times neglected.

The Olympic had not prospered during the absence of Mr. and Mrs. Mathews; without Vestris as the star, neither the cleverness of Planché nor the business acumen of William Vining had succeeded in maintaining the theatre's usually high level of success; nor apparently had an excellent company,

headed by Farren, the comedian, and including such charming ladies as Mrs. Nesbitt, Mrs. Humby and Mrs. Orger, compensated the public for the temporary loss of Madame. Mathews also was missed, but it was his wife in particular whom London playgoers mourned; and although several of Planché's productions, notably *The Idol's Birthday* and *The Court of Old Fritz*, were well received, the takings that autumn had shrunk perceptibly.

It was in some ways fortunate, therefore, that the American tour had proved a failure and that Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews, save by certain more intelligent critics, were but poorly thought of in the United States. The reason for the unpopularity of two such accomplished artistes is hard to find, although a spitefully circulated rumour that Mr. Price, the New York manager, had "had them married" in haste, prior to fixing the engagement was most damaging. For Americans, on the surface, at least, are prudes. It is possible too, that Charles Mathews's impish sense of humour and his wife's arrogantly expressed impatience of conditions or persons that irked her had tended to complicate matters. The tour, for whatever reason, failed. By Christmas, Mr. and Mrs. Mathews were in England again and the reappearance of Vestris announced. She was to return to the London stage in *Bluebeard*, a Christmas extravaganza, the production of which, to ensure her presence in the cast, had been postponed until the second of January.

Charles, although not favoured by parts of any great size, had been employed with some regularity during the autumn season; his willingness to officiate as a sort of odd-job man and to take pity on those rôles disdained by the more experienced or vainer members of the company had earned him the good opinion of Mr. Vining, a more valuable asset at that stage of the young actor's career than any number of long or showy speeches. He had succeeded also in pleasing Mr. Planché, was a great favourite with the ladies and, by reason of not putting himself forward, by no means disliked by the gentlemen.

Barty, in fact, was unanimously voted a good fellow, and, on finding himself so popular, grew happier every day.

In spite of this contentment, he was glad enough to pay an occasional visit to Daniel Ellesmere and to hear news from him of Margaret and William John; the language of the theatre being one he was still only learning to speak, Charles found, to his surprise, a certain relief in being at times among his own kind. He had grown fond, too, of Daniel, who, after one grave effort to dissuade his young kinsman from going on the stage, had ceased altogether to "preach," as Charles called it, and even took a decided interest in his career; he had been once to watch Charles act at the Olympic, and might indeed have gone there oftener, but for the death in June of his wife.

Since this event, as Charles was forced to admit, his visits to Bishopsgate Street had grown pleasanter; Catherine Ellesmere, while treating her guest civilly, had contrived to indicate without saying so that she approved neither of himself nor of his way of life; without her, Daniel, although undoubtedly feeling his loss, showed a new geniality, a tendency to laugh at jokes, at which in Catherine's presence he would hardly have smiled. His four young children were all devoted to Charles, regarding him, in view of his calling, as a kind of story-book hero.

At Christmas time, however, Daniel was not in London, having gone with his flock to Longdale and Charles, refusing several invitations offered him at the theatre, had resolved to devote the whole day to Kitty. He was young enough and old-fashioned enough to miss his home at such a season and, as John Baron had never failed to celebrate the occasion by unbending, Charles's recollections of Christmas were unclouded. He inclined, therefore, to shun the notion of any riotous or noisy gathering and to turn gratefully to the quieter distractions promised at Frith Street.

He lay late in bed on Christmas morning, looking at the pretty basket of fruit which he had found beside him on waking,

and listening to the children, who sang carols out in the street. He was also considering a piece of information which had been given him the night before by d'Orsay. The Count still made it a habit to drop in occasionally to the Olympic, where he always expressed great pleasure at seeing Charles, never failing to rally him on that ignorance of waltzing which had led so directly to a stage career.

"And zat reminds me," he had said, returning to the subject in the Green Room on Christmas Eve. "My long-faced friend, Tempest, who dragged me to zat so tedious ball, is to be married very shortly. Oh, la, la! It will take a brave woman to endure such dullness."

Charles felt a queer pang as he asked carelessly, "Indeed? Who is the lady?"

"A Miss Clifford. But now that I think, it was at her mother's house that we meet, *n'est ce pas, mon petit Barty?* So you must know ze fair fiancée?"

"Yes," mumbled Charles; "I do."

He had a tell-tale face and d'Orsay smiled. "Ah, Barty," he said with genuine kindness, "*ne vous fachez pas*. A young lady who can select such a husband is not ze wife for you. You need ze loving heart, *mon ami, et l'âme fidèle*. Such a woman would not marry Harry Tempest."

Charles made no answer.

Yet, now as he lay in bed he wondered if d'Orsay had not spoken wisely. The loving heart, the faithful soul. These words painted no picture of Rose Clifford. Grimly, Charles wondered if she had ever loved him, if her pretence to do so had not been mere wanton coquetry, inspired by a wish to lead him on to the protestations and kisses that fed her vanity. Charles conceded that she might, while loving him, have betrothed herself for wisdom's sake to Harry Tempest; but she could not, while loving him, have had her door closed in his face, have given those insulting orders to her servants. The humiliation suffered on the doorstep in Hertford Street still rankled.

After all, he thought, there were other women. He knew of two at least who made no secret of their fancy for him. And he was uncertain of himself no longer; he had shed that callousness which finds so dismal a satisfaction in unrequited love. Charles no longer wanted to "sigh like a furnace" nor to make "a woeful ballad to his mistress's eyebrow." He wanted a more human and mutual kind of satisfaction. And why should he not have this? There *were* other women. And there was Kitty.

At the thought of this loyal friend his face softened; all through the past year Kitty's fidelity and affection had never wavered. It was she who kept him merry in moments of discouragement and homesickness; she who tried to teach him the hard lesson of economy. She who lent him the value of her own stage experience; and who did those humble necessary tasks, such as the darning of socks and the ironing of shirt frills, which, at Bryanston Square, had been done automatically by the servants. Above all, it was she who had dispelled the embarrassment which had so naturally followed the sequel to their supper-party at Bretts.

On the morning after that incident, Charles had suffered much mortification. He had been taught very strictly to respect women and, revolted by his crude assumption of Kitty's lightness, had bitterly reproached himself for insulting so sweet a girl. He was ready to be apologetic, abject even, and more than ready to be bashful; but Kitty behaved as if nothing out of the way had happened, maintaining this attitude so cleverly that Charles almost came to believe nothing had, and, if not entirely able to dismiss the episode in his bedroom as part of a mild delirium, he came near enough to doing so for his own comfort. He never again ventured even to trifle with Kitty although he wanted very badly at times to kiss her. But her own sisterly gaiety forbade it.

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The dinner that afternoon was hardly a banquet, for no side-dishes reinforced the customary turkey and plum pudding;

but the table was bright with holly set round a vase of graceful Christmas roses; the parlour was almost tidy and a great cluster of mistletoe swung from the ceiling.

There were no guests. Philip O'Brien had begged admission for some of his cronies, but Kitty, while hating to disappoint her father, put her desire for an orderly and pleasant festivity above her anxiety to please him; having the simple notion that Charles was used to more splendour than she could provide him with, she had resolved at least to keep the Christmas harmony unmarred by discordant notes. Her father took the refusal in good part. He was fond of Charles and determined to honour both the occasion and his young friend by behaving with the utmost decorum; with this objective he went to some pains to array himself respectably for dinner, and the results of such unusual meticulousness were so admirable that Philip O'Brien, well-shaved and wearing freshly laundered linen, presented, that Christmas, a most gentleman-like appearance.

Before dinner Charles gave his host a package which contained a fine new pipe, of most original design. He then, a little shyly, handed a parcel to Kitty.

"Oh, Charlie, what can it be? How good you are!" She tore the paper off impatiently and discovered a handsome shawl.

"Do you like it?" Charles asked anxiously. "Are these the colours you care for?"

"It's beautiful. It's far too fine. Oh, Charlie, how reckless you are! And how kind."

Philip O'Brien seemed well pleased by this attention to his daughter. "That's right, me boy," he complimented Charles. "It's glad I am to know you can tell a sweet woman when you see one."

"What nonsense you do talk, Pa, to be sure!" exclaimed Kitty, blushing.

"It's not nonsense, me boy, is it?" O'Brien appealed to Charles, who blushed also.

"No, indeed, sir," he replied stoutly. "Let me put the shawl round you, Kitty." And he draped the soft folds of cashmere

about her shoulders, delighted with the reception of his gift and keeping to himself the fact that he had requested Miss Greene to choose the shawl, and had told the unsuspecting young lady that it was for his sister.

"You should give Charlie a kiss for it, me darlin'," O'Brien said easily.

"Oh, Pa, be quiet!"

"I will not. Isn't it Christmas time? And if you're so shy of kisses, miss, then why were you after hanging up the greenery?" O'Brien, winking, indicated the mistletoe. "Where's your manners?" he continued, turning to Charles. "Do you need me to show you the way?" He pulled his daughter underneath the mistletoe and kissed her.

"You're quite a gallant, Pa," laughed Kitty.

"Indeed, if that's true, then I'm the only one present. Your turn now, Charlie. Don't be backward. You can't be held to a kiss, they say, provided you stand right under the mistletoe."

There was nothing for it. And Charles, to pacify her father, put his arm around Kitty.

"There, ma'm," he said, laughing as he kissed her.

"Thank you kindly, sir," retorted Kitty. She laughed too, but not merrily.

"You were well wide of the mistletoe," remarked Philip O'Brien. And they sat down to dinner.

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The kitchen table had been decorated also and Sally, presiding over it, wore a blue bow in her red hair. Her dress was neat, she had removed her apron and on her feet were a pair of dainty slippers, a Christmas gift from Thomas, who had, in addition, promised her a rare concert of ballads when they were washing up the dishes afterwards. As she sat down to dinner Sally's cup of contentment was full.

But Thomas seemed distraught. His appetite, seldom affected, was certainly good; he displayed a seasonable cheerfulness, if of a pensive kind. But, as the meal progressed, his conversation grew monosyllabic.

Sally was troubled. She admired him so much, had looked forward so eagerly to this Christmas dinner *tête-à-tête* and had so rejoiced at the complete sundering of his relations with the Hopkins family. Was it possible, she wondered, that he had changed his mind, that the haughty Miss Betty had won him back and that Thomas wished himself, in his heart, at Number Eight?

"Are you well, Thomas?" she asked him timidly.

From his second plate of plum pudding, Thomas took a spoonful, the size of which should have reassured her. And he replied with terseness, "Puffickly."

He then relapsed into abstracted silence. Sally observed that his lips were moving. What could that mean? He would hardly have selected the dinner table at which to say his prayers. And he was frowning too. What can he be thinking of, wondered Sally.

Thomas's eccentricity had quite taken her appetite away. She did not enjoy her pudding and left the better part of it untouched. And her disappointment at the flatness of this longed-for feast was deep enough to bring tears to her eyes.

"I'll do it!" Thomas, with no previous warning, suddenly shouted out, and at the same moment looked at Sally.

"Why, Sal," he said, leaning across the table, "you're crying. What's up?"

"N-nothing," sniffed Sally.

"Will you marry me?" inquired Thomas.

Sally started as if he had struck her. "Here's a fine time for joking," she said indignantly. "On Christmas day and all." And the tears ran down her cheeks.

"Joking?" Thomas matched her in indignation. "Oo's joking? 'Ere 'ave I been a-sitting 'ere hadding up, and not getting a mite of relish out of me vittles, and you come at me that I'm joking."

"Adding up? Was that what you was doing?"

"What did you think I was doing?" asked Thomas plaintively. "I was hadding up what *I* get and what *you* get,

see. And I says to meself, that we both live easy enough *alone* on what we get, don't we? So if we pools it, see, and lives *together*, we'd still be as well hoff as what we was before. Hain't that correct henough for you?"

"Oh, Thomas," gasped Sally dumbfounded by this staggering display of logic.

"My room," continued Thomas, "is a big room. And your's hain't. What's to stop you moving into the big room, eh, Sally? After we're married, of course," he added primly.

"Oh, Thomas," said Sally again. After a moment's thought she asked him, "Do you think Miss Kitty will mind?"

"Mind? Lord love you, no. Why should she? There's nothing so genteel in the servant line as a married couple, and you'd know that, my dear, if you'd been about the world like I 'ave."

"Yes, Thomas," agreed Sally meekly; for she honestly believed him to be a much-travelled and widely experienced character.

"Very well, then," announced Thomas, "we're fixed." He leaned back in his chair and with more aptness than usual burst into the strains of "Dry be that tear." But in the very middle of a line, he stopped. "'Sally," he said; "I say, Sally."

"Yes, Thomas."

"You 'aven't said nothing. You 'aven't said 'Yes,' I mean." Thomas spoke with the blandest assumption that she could not, under any possible circumstances, say "No."

And nor, of course, could she. But some lucky spirit of coquetry, quite alien hitherto to humble Sally, took sudden possession of her—a Christmas gift from providence perhaps—under the spell of which she astounded Thomas by saying, "I'll think it over."

"You'll what?" he asked blankly.

"I'll think it over."

Thomas stared at her. With his mouth hanging open, his face very red and his eyes vacant with astonishment, he did not in any sense present a romantic picture. But Sally, the

most soft-hearted of girls, found such bewilderment pathetic, and extremely gratifying to herself as well; for she had never thought to possess the power to make her hero suffer. And at the sight of him, so utterly deflated, her small flirtatious impulse died an easy death; not, however, without having first performed its mission, since Sally's tentative hesitation had very largely increased her charms in Thomas's eyes.

"Sally," he began timidly.

But Sally could hurt him no more. "I have thought it over," she said. "And I'll marry you, Thomas. I—I'd be glad to."

Thomas hugged her.

In the parlour Philip O'Brien was sleeping; he had played his violin to please Charles and Kitty and at length, after giving them a feast of tunes, had felt drowsy. Thomas, in a state of suppressed excitement, had cleared away. A dish of chestnuts was put before the fire and Charles and Kitty settled down to roast them. But after a row of nuts had been placed along the bars of the grate—for they had no roaster—Charles seemed to forget their existence; he stared into the fire idly while the chestnuts blackened.

Kitty held Lawrence in her lap and stroked him. "Do you see pictures there, Charlie?" she asked softly.

Charles started. "Pictures? Oh, I don't know. Yes, a few, I suppose."

"Pretty ones?"

Charles moved restlessly. He had been thinking of Rose; recalling the picnic on his birthday and her gown of lilac muslin.

"Charlie," said Kitty, giving way to an impulse, "perhaps I should not ask you. But—that girl you once spoke of. Did nothing come of it?"

"Nothing."

"Was it because you left home? Because of the theatre?"

"Yes. Partly, that is. I—I heard last night from Count d'Orsay that she is very soon to be married."

"Poor boy." Kitty's hand touched his hair. Then quickly she withdrew it.

"No, don't," Charles said, "I like to feel your hand. I like you to stroke my forehead." He leaned against her and Kitty did as he asked.

"Did this news hurt you very greatly?" she ventured.

"To be honest, it did not. I gave up all hope long ago, you see. I have nothing to offer Rose."

"Rose is a pretty name," observed Kitty.

"No prettier than she is." Charles frowned at the fire. He did not wish just then to dwell on Rose's beauty.

"It can be very hurtful when love goes wrong, I know," said Kitty softly.

Charles looked up at her. "Did you love him so much?" he asked. "I mean your husband."

"Why, yes, Charlie, I did. Or so I thought. He was a handsome fellow."

"And do you still?"

"Oh, no. That's over. The love has gone now, so has the sadness. One day you'll feel the same about your Rose. Talk to me of her, if you care to."

So Charles recounted his love story which seemed slight enough in the telling; and Kitty, listening, conceived a strong dislike of Rose, for a woman is never so jealous as of the rival who has rejected a love which she herself would treasure.

She did not reveal her true feelings, but merely hinted at them by saying quietly, "Perhaps it is for the best, dear. She doesn't sound the girl who would have made you happy."

D'Orsay's words almost.

"You need some one very different from Rose, I fancy," added Kitty.

The loving heart, the faithful soul. Charles twisted round on his knees in order to face Kitty. "I know that," he told her,

"and I'm glad that Rose is married. It's made the cut a clean one."

"She's not married yet," Kitty reminded him quickly.

"But she soon will be. What should prevent it? And, as I said, the cut is clean. I shan't be longing any more or hoping. And I have longed and hoped at times, however much I deny it. I've been a fool, I fear."

"No, indeed, Charlie. It's only natural."

"You're so sweet, Kitty. You understand so well. But pray, don't *mis*understand me. Or pity me too much. I don't—well, in truth, I don't care now so very deeply."

"No, Charlie?"

"No. Do you know why, Kitty?"

"Because you're brave and sensible, perhaps."

"That's not the reason."

"What is then?" And in a voice that betrayed some of her eagerness Kitty went on to ask, "Have you quite ceased then, to love Rose?"

Charles strove to give an honest answer. "I think I have," he said, "and yet, were I to see her, Kitty, and if she were loving and tender—why, then I think perhaps I'd long for her again. As much as ever."

"I see," said Kitty.

"But that's all nonsense." Charles had changed his tone. "Because I shan't see her. I shall never see her again, and as she will so soon belong to Harry Tempest, well then I *can* forget her. Indeed, I had begun to when d'Orsay spoke."

"You're very wise, I think, dear, not to repine."

"I've no real cause to. You see, I—I've met another woman."

"Ah, don't be on with the new love too quickly. You might regret it and so might—so might the woman."

"No, no," Charles naïvely proceeded to explain, "there's no fear at all of that. For I *am* off with the old."

"Are you sure, Charlie? I'm not. What if you did see Rose?"

"I shall not. That's just a dream."

"Perhaps. But to make a habit of such dreaming might be a little hard upon your second choice."

"Oh, no, Kitty. She—whom you call my second choice—would understand. She is, what you said yourself, very different from Rose indeed."

"Is she?" asked Kitty.

"Oh, yes. She's all heart, you see. And generosity, and sweetness too. Why, don't you know that it's *you*, Kitty?"

"Ah, no, Charlie." Her voice quivered.

"Ah, yes, Kitty," Charles cried eagerly; carried away by the quiet intimacy of the moment, he was unaware how tame his declaration had sounded.

"You're in love with love, dear," Kitty warned him.

"Oh, don't be motherly, now," Charles urged impatiently. "You'll be moaning about those provoking six years in a minute. Can you really imagine a better assorted couple than we are?"

"But, Charlie, I'm married."

"The rogue deserted you. You can find some redress, surely. A divorce even." Charles spoke the last word doubtfully for he knew little of the process, and had been brought up to believe that it implied disgrace.

"I cannot divorce a man who can't be found," objected Kitty.

"He may be dead."

"Yes, dear, he may be. And I fancy that before very long I'm allowed by law to assume that. I've had no word from him now for the past five years.

"That's capital. We can be engaged at least. And who knows what may happen?"

Kitty winced. Would a man in love contemplate uncertainty so gaily? Yet she was not surprised, having already gussed from her knowledge of men that Charles did not really love her. He was fond of her, yes. And he needed tenderness sorely. It would be easy, too easy, to discard her sisterly pose and deliberately to seduce him. Then, until his desire had

cooled, she knew Charles would be hers. But afterwards? For passion would cool, of course, it always did, and what would then be left? Very little, Kitty told herself cruelly. For he did not love her.

"Won't you answer me?" Charles asked her.

"Not yet, my dear." Kitty fought her weakness. She loved this boy with her whole heart but she could not marry him. She was not free to do so; and even if she had been, how would it answer? She was below Charles in the social scale, she was but poorly educated, her connections were not respectable. And she herself—Kitty closed her eyes as if to shut out certain distasteful recollections. No; she dare not think of marriage. Better far to become his mistress, to teach him the art of love and destroy his innocence a little. Then to leave him or to submit casually to his leaving her. In Kitty's philosophy this seemed a sensible and not unmeritorious course of action. But she could not take it. It might be well for Charles to take some lessons in the pleasures of easy loving—but with some other teacher. She loved him far too well herself to mask sincerity by lightness.

She rose from her chair, and holding Lawrence's large, soft body against her bosom, smiled down at Charles.

"We'll say no more about this for the present, Charlie. You're not ready yet for a wife. Or to betroth yourself even. Wait till you've made your way. And then—and then—why then you may ask me again."

Charles scrambled to his feet. "But, Kitty, why should we wait?" he demanded. His voice was more petulant than tragical, and, a little ashamed, he added, "We could be happy enough together without being married."

Kitty held her breath. If he would only say, just once, "I love you!" Those words alone were needed to bring her to his arms.

Charles did not say them. "I need you, Kitty," was his substitute. "I need you near me."

"I am near you, Charlie," she answered briskly. "And

what good friends we are. Come, dear, don't spoil that friendship."

Charles stood there frowning at her. He was disappointed but he was not deeply moved. And Kitty's cheerful, elder-sisterly manner provoked him.

"Since I am so unpleasing to you," he said haughtily, "I suppose I should ask your pardon for what I have said."

Kitty laughed, and if her laughter held the desperate promise of hysteria, Charles did not recognise it.

"You silly boy!" she giggled. "It's a great compliment you've paid me, to be sure. But believe me, child, we're better off as we are. Come now, let's kiss each other and be friends again."

Sulkily Charles obeyed; with a resentful determination to follow Kitty's lead, he kissed her with brotherly brusqueness on the cheek.

"We're right under the mistletoe this time," said Kitty. And went on laughing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Orange Blossom

MARY CLIFFORD was by no means well pleased with the date set for Rose's wedding; the bleakness of January struck an unfashionable note; she had hoped to see the ceremony performed in early summer with a blaze of modish glory. So, but for her daughter's excessive folly, it might have been; had Harry's first offer been accepted the wedding would by now be over, and young Lady Tempest a figure in society already. Rose's refusal had spoiled this prospect, and now that Harry had returned from abroad, proposed for the second time and had been accepted quietly but without ardour, Mrs. Clifford was taking no risks. Her daughter must be married quickly.

But the time between November, when Rose had said yes, and January the third, which was the day selected for the wedding, seemed woefully short; quite inadequate indeed for the countless preparations that must be made. Mary Clifford consoled herself, however, by the thought that such swiftness spoke of romance and a most becoming warmth on the part of the bridegroom, and she worked like ten women to ensure that all should be in readiness. The trousseau must somehow or other be completed in time, the invitations sent out, the presents acknowledged, and all the details appertaining to a fashionable marriage ceremony attended to. And perhaps, thought Rose's mother, the necessary whirl and flurry would prove a god-send, keeping her daughter fully occupied, short of the leisure in which to change her mind.

In this view of the matter Mrs. Clifford received staunch support from the bridegroom-to-be; with regard to the date of the wedding, Harry Tempest displayed an impatience that equalled that of his future mother-in-law, for Rose, it so

happened, was the first woman who, on being coveted by him, had shown no apparent gratification. And it must by this be understood, that although the baronet had dallied prudently with various eligible young women of his own class, he had never before failed to carry his more serious emotions to the *demi-monde*, where the ladies, though purchased, could at least simulate the softer feelings.

Rose had furnished her future husband with a new experience. She was a gentlewoman, a member of his own world, who had aroused in him not merely a discreet fondness but a genuinely violent passion. Yet, such is the surface politeness of a certain section of society, that neither Harry himself nor Mrs. Clifford, although both fully comprehending the real nature of his feelings, had dreamed of revealing this mutual knowledge to one another or even of hinting at it. Mrs. Clifford, while talking with false sensibility of a good man's love, of marriage as a sanctified haven of security, knew that Tempest desired her daughter as he might a harlot, but was obliged, on account of Rose's position, to pay for his pleasure by marrying her. Tempest, in whose vacant mind physical inclination played a strong part, behaved during his courtship with an Englishman's invaluable stolidity. He brought Rose costly gifts and paid her vapid compliments, believing trustfully that his hungry glances at her passed unnoticed. But they did not, for Mary Clifford saw them clearly, and so, although she kept her own counsel, did Rose herself.

The girl, as far as experience went, was innocent; but she mixed freely with a group of fashionable young women, many of them married, and she used her wits; and, meditating during her engagement on certain collected fragments of conjugal lore, it had become a matter of calculation in her mind whether she could, once married, become Harry Tempest's master.

She even hinted as much one day, when in conversation with a somewhat outspoken young matron of her acquaintance, who, after listening, looked at Rose strangely.

"Do you really suppose, my poor dear," inquired Lady Clara Blande, "that you can escape from—well, from that sort of thing?"

"I should never allow a man to kiss me if I did not wish him to," said Rose. "Not even my husband."

"Kiss you?" repeated Lady Clara. "You don't surely imagine kissing to be the beginning and end of the matter?"

"No," Rose admitted candidly, "I do not. But a wife is not a slave surely who must submit to anything."

Lady Clara, herself a wife, docile rather than passionate, hesitated, not knowing what she should say. "Sir Harry will want an heir," she satisfied herself finally by remarking.

Rose shuddered. "I dislike children," she said coldly.

The words "and so do I" rose to Clara Blande's lips but she did not speak them; she had two children of her own and did not feel equal to explaining how little choice she had been allowed in the matter. So she merely smiled and wondered what Rose would make of marriage.

"Tell me, Clara," Rose asked her, "do you—have you ever—that is, do you——" She paused in some confusion.

"Do I what?"

"It's so difficult to express. But one reads and hears so much about love and—and passion. Have you ever felt——"

"My dear," interrupted Lady Clara, languidly shocked, "of course not!"

Rose sighed and changed the subject. She tried again to subdue a longing that disturbed her—a need for tenderness, an urge for the full experience of love that must have been impersonal; for it was certainly unconnected with Harry Tempest, and Rose claimed to have forgotten the very existence of Charles Baron.

As the wedding day drew nearer, she had no time to brood, or to think even, so completely did conferences with modistes, milliners, boot and glovemakers absorb her. The bridal gown, inspired by Paris, was a miracle of embroidered organdie, supported by a foundation of white satin and adorned with

wealth enough of Valenciennes flounces and ruchings to delight the vanity of any woman. But Rose, at the last fitting upon her wedding eve, considered the superb dress coldly. The veil was tried on, crowned by a garland of artificial orange blossom, for the real flowers were to come next day fresh from the florist. Rose, studying her fair reflection in the mirror, thought bitterly that the false wreath became her better; to wear true orange blossom, the symbol of a bride, seemed futile, since she would take with her to the altar no sentiments fit to match it. Within the exact joyous meaning of the word, she was not a bride at all. So why the trappings? But she put the thought from her and stood in resigned silence while the dressmaker raved out compliments and Mrs. Clifford looked on with the most radiant satisfaction.

The bridegroom meanwhile was enjoying his last evening of liberty and had been conventionally entertained by a party of boon companions gathered together to commemorate Harry Tempest's farewell to single blessedness. The festivities began with a dinner, given at a Mayfair hotel and eaten at the un-stylish hour of six, in order to allow the gentlemen time, if so inclined, to go on afterwards to the play. Or to some less public place of amusement. There were fifteen guests in all, and a quite disproportionate number of bottles of wine.

At about nine o'clock the party broke up, or rather moved on, the members of it having decided that the time had now come for them to explore fresh avenues of distraction.

"Are we to see no women?" asked a hopeful guest. "I think we should wind up the evening with women."

"For shame!" laughed another. "Harry is to be married to-morrow. Would you send him to his bride straight from a wanton's bed."

"That is not unusual," remarked a third.

So the gentlemen wrangled amicably as to how the remainder of the night should be disposed of, and only the guest of honour held his peace. Harry was drunk, a condition that

tended to make him amorous, and he began, as the talk grew lewder, to think with sullen lustfulness of Rose. *In vino veritas*—Harry knew that she did not love him. The frigid vixen! He considered with excitement the prospect of subduing her to his pleasure.

At length, after much discussion, loud laughter and many coarse comments, the evening's entertainment was resolved upon by the gentlemen electing unanimously to visit a certain discreet and high-class establishment, well known to all of them as Mother Victoria's. The proprietress of this house of pleasure was acquainted with every rake in London, and it was a matter of ribald mirth among them that she should bear the same name as their virtuous young Queen.

The carriages were called. Fourteen cheerful revellers disposed themselves, leaving the fifteenth, whose head was weak, stretched in a state of deep unconsciousness under the dining-room table.

Harry Tempest drove in his own carriage, accompanied by his intimate friend, Mr. Lauder, by Lord Ottershaw, and by a Mr. Velvett.

"Where are we going to?" he asked dully, as the horses started.

"Hark at him!" laughed Velvett. "He must have been asleep. Here's the lion of the evening and he asks where we are going. As if the whole entertainment had not been devised for his benefit!"

"I shouldn't call him a lion," observed Mr. Lauder, "but a lamb rather, who is to be sacrificed at the altar to-morrow."

"Unless, of course," murmured Lord Ottershaw, "one referred to Miss Clifford as the lamb instead."

"Where are we going?" Harry asked again.

"Where else but to Mother Victoria's," Lauder replied. "We felt sure you would wish to say good-bye to the old — and to her pretty maids. For you won't be seeing them again, Harry. At least, not for some little while."

"Not, one presumes, until after the honeymoon," put in Velvett.

Lord Ottershaw laughed. "It's quite astonishing," he observed, "how many wedding-eve farewells one has witnessed at Vicky's, only to run into the very same bridegroom there again, a month or so later."

"And how do the poor fellows explain such back-sliding?" Lauder inquired.

"Oh, some look the other way, some try to blazon it out. And little—well never mind his name—whom I caught there not six weeks after his wedding, had the quaintest excuse of all."

"What was that?"

"Why, he claimed to have forgotten to make his adieux to Coralie, and was at Vicky's, he declared, for the sole purpose of repairing that omission."

Every one laughed at this except Tempest; and Lauder gave it as his opinion that Coralie was a fine girl.

"Well enough," said Velvett. "But for my part I prefer——"

But he got no further for Tempest with drunken emphasis cried out, "Stop the carriage!"

"My dear fellow, what's amiss?" asked Lauder.

"I'm not coming with you. What should I be doing in a bordel when I possess a woman worth a thousand of that damned old Victoria's drabs?"

"You don't possess her yet," pointed out Velvett.

Ottershaw, who could jest coarsely enough about a certain class of woman, was shocked. "I don't think you should bring your future wife's name into such a conversation," he said reprovingly to Tempest.

"Why not?" the baronet demanded with truculence. "All women are the same, aren't they? We buy 'em all, whether it's with champagne and guineas or with a wedding ring."

Ottershaw looked so disgusted that Lauder intervened. "Come now," he said pacifically, "wine always makes Harry

cynical, and I agree with Otter here that Miss Clifford's name should be left out of it."

"So you think she'd refuse me a little pre-nuptial tenderness, do you?" muttered Harry.

Velvett, who did not appear to share the scruples of either Lauder or Ottershaw, displayed amusement. "You're boasting," he told Tempest. "You would never dare to hint even at such a thing."

"Oh, so you think that, do you?" retorted Harry. "You think I've chosen an iceberg and am frightened to approach her." This so very nearly described the true state of affairs that he repeated the words with some violence. "An iceberg, eh, and am frightened to approach her?"

"This is disgusting," observed Lord Ottershaw.

But Mr. Velvett was enjoying himself. "If you think the lady will be so obliging, Harry," he suggested, "why not try it? Why not pay your addresses to *her* this evening instead of to the little darlings of the town?"

"You jest," Harry said sulkily, "because you think I would not dare to do it."

"Well, would you?" taunted Velvett.

"Oh, for God's sake," Lauder broke in impatiently, "have done with this. As a joke it's in the poorest of taste."

"Who said it was a joke?" asked Harry. He turned with drunken persistence to Velvett. "So you think I would not dare, do you? Well, we shall see. Would you fancy a wager?"

"Certainly," was the cool retort. "Two hundred pounds if you make a call on Miss Clifford."

"Done with you!" Harry Tempest pulled the cord to attract his coachman's attention.

"What a fool you are to lead him on in such a condition," said Lauder angrily to Velvett.

The carriage stopped. The footman sprang down and came to the window.

"Tell William to drive to Mrs. Clifford's house in Hertford Street," directed Harry Tempest. The man touched his hat.

"This is too much!" exclaimed Lauder. "The farther away we drive from Hertford Street the better. Call to that fellow, Otter, and countermand the order."

But, as Lord Ottershaw moved, Harry Tempest turned on him. "My servants," he said savagely, "obey *me*. And this is none of your business."

The carriage started. Ottershaw sank back in his seat with an expression of disdainful resignation.

"Velvett," begged Lauder, "you are responsible for this shameful nonsense. Now dissuade Harry if you can."

"No," replied Mr. Velvett lazily. "I don't want to. I am anxious to see what he'll do."

"But it's an insult!" wailed Lord Ottershaw.

Velvett merely smiled, and as the carriage covered the very short distance to Hertford Street all four of its occupants were silent. Lauder, who had some real affection for Harry Tempest, was the most concerned. Lord Ottershaw was contemptuous; and Velvett, who found amusement in the weaknesses of others, immensely diverted. But not one of these gentlemen believed that Harry Tempest would really alight at Rose's door.

They were wrong. Inflamed by wine, by the opposition of Lauder and Ottershaw and by the incredulity of Velvett; inflamed even further by his own amorous thoughts of Rose and the recollection of her frigidity; and determined to make a show at least of carrying out his boast, Harry hardly waited until the carriage had stopped. Stumbling over the feet of his companions, he had the door open before his footman could alight, and lurched out on to the pavement.

"Harry," beseeched Lauder, making an attempt to follow him.

"It's no affair of ours now," Ottershaw said scornfully and pulled him back.

"He has rung the bell, egad!" shouted Velvett with delighted astonishment.

It was indeed in that very act of ringing that Harry's

courage wavered and he longed to take refuge in flight. But, without making himself a laughing stock, such a course would be impossible now. Velvett was watching from the carriage and Velvett had a tongue which altogether belied his name. Lauder and Ottershaw would refrain, if for Rose's sake only, from spreading the story; but Harry knew he could expect no such reticence from Velvett. It was imperative, therefore, that he should enter the house.

The door was opened by a very young manservant who was temporarily in charge. Mr. Parks and the first footman, in consideration of the hard work ahead of them on the morrow, were enjoying an evening off. Mary Clifford, expecting no visitors, was resting in her boudoir and had given strict orders that she was not to be disturbed. The young footman, recognising Sir Harry Tempest, noting his obviously disordered state and hearing him ask for Rose, hardly knew what to answer; yet, feeling incapable of denying a lady to her betrothed, he somewhat timidly invited the baronet to enter. Harry complied and the door closed behind him.

"He has got so far at all events!" Velvett remarked sardonically.

"It is a most ungentlemanly act!" commented Ottershaw.

"Ah well." Lauder spoke less anxiously. "We may have troubled ourselves unnecessarily after all. For the young lady's mother will make short work of him. Let us take our revenge by commandeering the carriage and driving on in it to Vicky's."

"Not I," declared Velvett. "I must wait here to see how long our gentleman remains inside. I've money at stake, remember."

"I shall go home," said Ottershaw curtly, for the incident had revolted him.

He alighted from the carriage and made off with the very briefest of good-nights. Velvett announced his intention of loitering in the neighbourhood, and Mr. Lauder, much crest-

fallen, alighted also; but he did not offer to share Velvett's vigil, preferring to proceed alone and on foot to seek consolation at Mother Victoria's.

Once inside the house, Harry Tempest's courage failed him still further, enough in fact to make him, momentarily, almost sober. But as he had no intention of showing his face outdoors and could hardly suggest to the footman that he should wait in the hall, he followed that young man to a small parlour, the only one among the reception-rooms which had not been disarranged in readiness for the wedding.

And in this parlour, wearing a lacy dressing-gown and crouched over the fire, sat Rose herself. Lonely and nervous, oppressed by the clutter of bridal finery in her own apartment, she had come to read by the fire, to try to forget the ordeal that lay before her. But although a book lay open beside her, she had not been reading. After striving vainly to convince herself that she was foolish—that hundreds of girls improved their position by marrying without love—that she would soon be as gay and unconcerned as they were—and that Harry, a man of breeding, would take no unsanctioned liberties with her—Rose had given up. She had resigned herself to melancholy apprehensions and to a quite unrestrained longing for Charles. For what use to her now were her pride and her pretences since she was so soon and so irrevocably to marry Tempest? What purpose remained in concealing the wound that Charles had inflicted on her by his desertion? How would it help her now to deny that she wanted him and him only?

Breaking abruptly into her thoughts came the footman's voice announcing Harry Tempest, the one person above all others whom she least wanted to see. The servant, withdrawing, closed the door, and Rose, much startled, sprang to her feet.

"Sir Harry!" she exclaimed, and her voice expressed no hint of affection or pleasure.

From the threshold Harry stared, and at the sight of Rose

diaphanously clad, her curls in loose disorder about her face, the animal in him stirred.

Stumbling towards her he asked thickly, "Have you no warmer welcome for me, Rose?"

She drew herself up. "I was not expecting you," she said. "Mamma is resting."

"And what of it? Need we be so formal. I am almost your husband, my dear." Harry came closer.

"Almost perhaps. But not quite." Rose had remarked by now his flushed face, the glaze over his eyes, the thickness of his voice. She remarked, too, how intently he watched her, and she instinctively drew the lace closer over her bosom.

This gesture, which seemed to symbolise her whole policy of withdrawal, maddened Harry. "You needn't try any false modesty with me," he told her roughly. "We'll have no secrets from each other after to-morrow."

"You have been dining with your friends, I see," said Rose, striving for calmness.

"I have. Does that displease you, madam? Is there any reason why I should not?"

"Not a reason in the world. It is the custom, I believe, on the night before a man's marriage. But it is not the custom to call upon a lady in such a condition. Your bride least of all. And I—I am not prepared to receive you." And Rose, saying this, prepared to leave the room.

Harry stepped in front of her. "Not so fast, my little ice maiden. And not so censorious either. Would you not rather I came here for a glimpse of *you* than went—er—elsewhere?"

"I am not interested in your diversions," Rose retorted. "You are intoxicated. Please, let me pass."

"Say that again," taunted Harry, who still barred her way.

"Stand aside, please. I order you to let me pass."

"But I don't take orders from women, pretty one. And that, by the way, is something we should be quite clear about. To avoid any misunderstandings after marriage! I will let you pass for a kiss. Come now, pay the toll money."

"A kiss! In your condition. How dare you, Sir Harry? I would sooner die."

Tempest made no answer; breathing hard, with his face crimson, he tore the lace away from Rose's breast; then with his arm about her, he covered her face with kisses, almost bruising her with his violence, sickening her with his wine-scented breath. His free hand fumbled lasciviously at her bosom.

"You cur!" Rose panted. With a swift twist, unexpectedly powerful, she escaped him, stayed long enough to strike him full and hard across the face, and fled.

She did not stop to think how, or in what order, Harry would leave the house, nor whether the footman had been listening. Blazing with anger and half in tears, she burst into her mother's boudoir, arousing that lady most unceremoniously from a very pleasant doze.

"My child, what is the matter?" Mrs. Clifford asked in alarm. And Rose, now weeping freely, sobbed out the story.

"He is a fiend," she cried. "A low, vile, profligate! And to think that I might have married him to-morrow."

Mrs. Clifford sat bolt upright on the sofa.

"But you are going to marry him to-morrow," she said calmly.

Her daughter stared, as at a woman demented. "I hope I shall never set eyes on him again," she vowed, still sobbing.

"You exaggerate, child," came the placid answer. "Harry was intoxicated."

"He was drunk." Rose took some pleasure in using the coarser word. "Fouly drunk. He came here to assault me."

"His behaviour," agreed Mrs. Clifford, "was most reprehensible. And he should not have been admitted. Parks most certainly would have referred him to me. But you are taking far too dramatic a view of this, my love. A man will be a man. And Harry loves you."

"No," replied Rose, with what to her mother was the most startling candour, "he merely desires me."

"Rose! How can you say such things? Or even think them? Harry loves you in a man's way. Wait till you're married, child, then you will understand,"

"But I am not going to be married, Mamma. Not, at any rate, to Harry Tempest. I have already said so."

Mrs. Clifford, controlling her agitation with some difficulty, made an effort to speak soothingly. "Yes, yes, love. I heard you. And I think it quite natural. Harry has behaved very ill and has frightened you sadly."

"I was not frightened. I was merely revolted."

"Be that as it may, my dear girl must not judge too harshly. These farewell bachelor parties are very wild. The poor fellow was inflamed by drink and gave way to his natural longing to see you. You should be a little flattered, child."

"Flattered!" flashed Rose. "Flattered at being treated like—like a common woman."

"I'll vow he had no such thought," Mrs. Clifford assured her hastily. "He was hardly conscious probably of what he was about. Remember, Rose, how you have kept the poor fellow waiting. How cold you have been, how capricious."

"It would seem, Mamma," said Rose in a flat, hard voice, "that you set very small store by my virtue."

"My dear! You are mad to talk so. I am most perturbed naturally. And mightily vexed at Harry. But the danger was not very great. There were people within call. And I cannot credit that he went far."

"Far enough," replied Rose curtly. And with a significant gesture she touched her bosom.

Mrs. Clifford glanced at the torn lace and swiftly averted her eyes. "Had it been your wedding night——" she began.

"Had it been my wedding night," answered her daughter, "there would have been no escape. For that, I am thankful it happened."

"Why, Rose, what do you mean?"

"I mean, Mamma, that when I marry I shall select a gentle-

man. Not a wild beast. And you may make what excuses you can to Harry Tempest in the morning."

Once again Mary Clifford was called upon to exercise great self-control; knowing how stubborn and wilful Rose could be, she felt extremely apprehensive. What an undisciplined fool had Harry showed himself! And what a task lay ahead of her to ensure that the wedding took place. She decided that the only possible method now was to humour Rose and accordingly she said kindly, "You are overwrought, dearest girl, and small wonder. What a sad villain Harry is! But you will have more charity, believe me, when you are married."

"Perhaps," conceded Rose, "I shall. Perhaps I may find a worthier object for such charity. For you may rest assured, Mamma, that I am not going to marry Tempest."

"This is hysteria," whimpered Mary Clifford. "Calm yourself, darling, pray."

"I am perfectly calm, Mamma," replied her daughter.

"You had better take some sal volatile and go to bed. The whole affair will seem quite different in the morning."

Stonily, Rose allowed her mother to ramble on, and when Mary Clifford declared she would fetch the sal volatile herself the girl made no protest. If it pleased her mother to coax and dose her what did she care? Neither sal volatile nor pleadings would alter her decision. She would never marry Harry Tempest.

Mrs. Clifford left the room and Rose, exhausted, sank back in the arm-chair. Her thoughts now would have amazed and horrified her mother. For Rose, with all her indignation against Harry, and even as she fought his embraces, had felt within herself some strange response. Not to the man himself but to his passion. And she might, in other arms than Harry's, have returned good measure. She might have given herself with the very abandonment of those women whom she called common—had the arms not been Harry's.

"Oh, Charles," she whispered, "why did you go away?"

And Rose began to weep afresh, forgetting in the force of her self-pity what very grudging encouragement she had given to Charles.

She went on weeping, twisting, as women will, her flimsy handkerchief into knots, until, exasperated suddenly with the soaking, useless rag she pushed it with careless impatience down behind the seat of the chair. Her hand touched something that felt like paper and mechanically she pulled this out.

It seemed to be a letter, crushed and twisted, but not torn. Rose smoothed the pages out, saw her own name and recognised the handwriting. Then, hearing her mother's footsteps, she crushed the letter tightly in her closed hand.

Mrs. Clifford, returning well-armed with *sal volatile* and good advice, was amazed at the promptitude with which Rose agreed to go at once to bed. The girl seemed quiet now, almost as if the painful episode downstairs had never happened. She drank her medicine, bade her mother good-night and refused to have her maid sent for.

"I only want to rest, Mamma," Rose said meekly. And Mary Clifford's spirits rose a little. She was consoled by Rose's docility which foreshadowed a wiser outlook on the morrow.

"Good-night, love," she said, kissing her daughter. "I will come back a little later to see if you are sleeping."

"Thank you, Mamma." Rose spoke with a demureness which cost her much effort; she could hardly stem the wild surge of her impatience to be left alone with Charles's letter.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

A Lady Leaves Home

ON the night of the second of January Kitty O'Brien sat alone in the parlour. Her father had set out on his usual search for refreshment; Charles was at the theatre, where Thomas, taking Sally with him, had gone also, to witness the opening performance of *Bluebeard*, the postponed Christmas Extravaganza in which Madame Vestris was to make her reappearance.

Kitty was reading a letter, which although it had only been in her possession for a few hours, she knew almost by heart. It came from Dublin, from her sister Beatrice, and told her that she was a widow. Kitty's husband was dead. The unhappy man, after years of disreputable wandering, had drifted to Ireland, where on becoming destitute, he had appealed to Beatrice and her husband for assistance. These good souls, most forgivingly, had taken him in, only to watch him die of a fever three days later.

Kitty was too tenderhearted not to have shed a few tears. She had loved the handsome wastrel once and could not contemplate his wretched end unmoved. But, only naturally, her chief sensation on at first reading Beatrice's letter had been one of immense relief. Her husband had lived with her for a few months, had borrowed money from his father-in-law, ill-treated Kitty and left her; in his absence he had been a dead weight, placing her in the most pitiable of all situations—that of a married woman bereft of legitimate protection and support. But now she was a widow. She was free. And she knew now what answer to give Charles should he ever repeat to her his proposal of marriage. For Kitty, who had framed her refusal of his first offer so gallantly, regretted it already and desired nothing so fervently as to become the wife of her rejected suitor.

Although Beatrice's letter had reached London that afternoon, Kitty had mentioned its arrival to no one, but, in the light of her unexpected freedom, had examined most carefully her objections to marrying Charles. And these she now felt almost justified in discarding. On reconsidering the social difference between herself and Charles, Kitty wisely recollected that he had not set out to lead a life of fashion, and that, moreover, as he was quite estranged from his father and virtually so from his brother and sisters, there would be no superior relatives to look down upon her. Surveying next the disparity in age, Kitty wondered if her seniority to Charles might not prove ultimately an advantage, enabling her with the aid of a riper experience to check some of his youthful impulses and follies. If the memory of certain sordid follies of her own rose up to vex her, Kitty did not heed it. The past was one thing, the future another. And did not this very lack of innocence make her the better fitted to be the wife of an actor? Her knowledge of men should save her from jealousy of the women with whom her husband's calling brought him into contact, and she was far better equipped to deal with the mixed society of the theatre than had she been coldly virtuous or a fine lady. Above all other considerations, she loved Charles dearly.

So, setting Beatrice's letter aside at last, Kitty resolved to show Charles, by a woman's subtle means, that she might be proposed to again and that her second answer might differ altogether from her first one. This decided, and with a deep sigh of satisfaction, she curled up on the sofa, to dream there of happiness, Charles's primarily, but also her own, for if her feeling for him was largely maternal, it had the ardour of a natural passion as well, and Kitty's life so far had brought her little joy.

She lay there dreaming, forgetting for once to fret about her father or to wonder how Jack was faring in America and why he had not written to her for so long. Her fancy built a delightful home for Charles and herself, and wove a glitter-

ingly successful future for her husband. She forgot no one in her planning, picturing a special room for her father, so cosy and inviting that he would be tempted to leave it only to perform at the concerts arranged for him by his son-in-law and daughter. Concerts which the great Paganini would attend as a humbly respectful listener. Nor were Jack and her sisters forgotten, while as for Thomas and Sally, Kitty installed them comfortably in her dream domain, as cook and butler. The choice of a wedding gown came next. Kitty's thoughts carried her to the silk merchants, from where as she fingered the rich, imagined fabrics, a knock on the door recalled her. She glanced at the clock, saw the time to be nearly twelve, and went in some perplexity to answer the summons. Charles had a latchkey and so had her father, who, although not always in a condition to use his, would hardly be back so early.

Still dreaming a little, Kitty opened the door to see standing before her a young woman—a young lady rather, whose fashionable attire was sadly unsuited to the weather, for it was raining. As Kitty peered silently at the stranger, a sense of foreboding oppressed her.

"Does Mr. Baron, Mr. Charles Baron, still stay here?" inquired the young lady.

Kitty's heart beat fast but she answered calmly, "Yes. But he's not here now."

"You mean that he's away?" In the speaker's voice anxiety struggled against hauteur, and Kitty, with great reluctance, reassured her.

"Mr. Baron is not away," she said. "He is at the theatre." She made an instinctive movement to close the door.

"But he is returning, surely?" The young lady's anxiety now showed itself more plainly.

"Why, yes," Kitty grudgingly conceded, "he is coming back. But not until later."

"Then I will wait for him." Rose, for it was she, spoke with so proud a determination, that Kitty regretted her admission.

"Will you come into the parlour," she said shortly and led the way.

Rose followed.

By the light of the parlour lamp the two young women studied one another. This mutual scrutiny was a cold one. With a sinking heart, Kitty, feeling unhappily positive of the visitor's identity, remarked Rose's elegance and beauty; and Rose, while taking in every weak point about Kitty, did not fear her the less. This creature, she decided, though flashy and common, was not to be ignored. Rose knew that all too often men were attracted by just such tawdriness and by such a blatant lack of refinement.

"Are you the landlady?" she asked.

Kitty flushed. "Why, yes, I am. At least, this is my father's house."

"And Mr. Baron has lodged here for some time?"

"More than a year now."

"Oh," said Rose frigidly, "I see."

There was a lengthy and uncomfortable silence. Rose employed this by coolly appraising the parlour, which struck her as being disorderly and shabby in the extreme. Then she saw Lawrence and shuddered. She hated cats. Lawrence, as if sensing this unspoken hostility, arched his back at her and spat, unmistakably, if discreetly. Rose with another shudder moved farther away from him and Kitty, sensing only too plainly the interloper's disdain, both hated and feared her.

But she invited her civilly enough to be seated.

Rose complied, first glancing critically at the chair cushion as if expecting it to be dusty. "Will Mr. Baron return soon?" she asked curtly.

"I can't tell you that," replied Kitty. "Madame Vestris, as you doubtless know, is making an appearance to-night, the first since her absence in America. There will be much company in the Green Room, I dare say, which may delay Mr. Baron."

"Indeed," Rose murmured languidly, as if anxious to disclaim all knowledge of, or interest in, theatrical matters.

Kitty's dislike of her grew, blinding her to the undercurrent of emotion which might by a less prejudiced person have been observed beneath the insolence of Rose's manner. Her voice, for all its haughtiness, was unsteady and she constantly twisted her white hands together.

Kitty missed these signs of distress, however. She wished now that she had lied, had told this proud, pretty invader from another world that Charles lived in Frith Street no longer. This misrepresentation, although he could have been traced easily enough at the Olympic, would have given Kitty time—time to have frustrated Rose's scheming. For it was Rose beyond all shadow of doubt. Rose seeking Charles. Kitty glanced covertly at the fine dress and mantle, noted how wet they were, saw that the tiny, fragile shoes were muddy. She had walked then, this sheltered creature, walked through the rain and darkness to claim her lover. She must have been desperate, too, to do it. And yet this girl, so Kitty had understood, was betrothed, was about to make a most advantageous marriage. She looked at Rose's hand, the left one, and at the third finger. No ring adorned it. Kitty's heart beat faster.

"Do not let me detain you, ma'am, pray," said Rose, seeming to convey that while the parlour might be Kitty's only sanctum, she wished to be relieved at once of her presence.

"As you choose, ma'am." Kitty picked up her sewing from the table; it was a shirt which she had been mending for Charles, and, a little defiantly, she clutched the fine white cambric to her bosom. But Rose took no notice. She sat very still now and looked with a sombre intentness at the fire. Kitty resolved to seek her own room, to listen from there for Charles and to intercept him. Intercept him? Why? For what purpose? It would be impossible to conceal Rose's presence from him for long. And when he saw her? With a biting clearness Kitty recalled some of the words he had spoken—"Were I to see her, Kitty, and if she was loving and tender—"

why, then I think perhaps I'd long for her again. As much as ever." She knew herself defeated.

"I must warn you," she said, speaking with a coldness that matched Rose's, "that Mr. Baron may be very late in returning. He did not expect a—visitor."

"That does not signify. Don't leave that cat here, pray."

"Certainly not, if he vexes you. Come, Lawrence."

The handsome beast rose slowly, brushed as if on purpose against Rose's skirts, and left the room with his mistress.

As the door closed behind them, Rose's demeanour changed. Up till then her natural instinct to crush such a woman as Kitty had strengthened her self-control, but there was no further need now for such resistance. The mask of chilly composure dropped. Rose paced the room wildly, until, as a sensation almost of faintness overcame her, she sank down on the sofa and let the frightened turmoil of her thoughts run riot.

What had she done? What impulse of love for Charles Baron and loathing for Harry Tempest had led her to the mad course of leaving her mother's house? Rose, who could hardly answer these questions now, had been at the time of her flight entirely collected. She had feigned sleep on Mrs. Clifford's second visit to her bedroom; had heard that exhausted lady retire to her own apartment; had waited prudently until the whole house was quiet and then had dressed. She had written a note for her mother, saying little except that Mrs. Clifford need not be anxious, had packed her jewellery in readiness to take with her, putting what money she possessed into the jewel-case, and discarding only Harry Tempest's ring of diamonds which she left lying in splendid isolation upon her toilet-table.

It was perhaps when she first stood outside in Hertford Street and felt the heavy raindrops, that the full rashness of her scheme came home to Rose. She had closed the front door behind her and could not, without rousing the household, gain readmittance. She had no latchkey. And how could she,

wearing her outdoor dress, carrying her jewel-case, summon at such an hour her mother's servants? What story could she tell them? How explain plausibly the fact of being shut out? A man might permissably soothe his disordered mind by walking the streets at night, but not a woman. Rose could concoct no tarradiddle to excuse her conduct.

And so she had started to walk, a young girl, delicately nurtured, richly dressed, passing alone through the dark streets of London. It was eleven o'clock or after and Rose, in frightened consciousness of the hour, quickened her pace; even by daylight she was quite unaccustomed to walking, except in the park, but she possessed as it happened a fair sense of direction and knew from her drives in the carriage pretty clearly where Soho lay. Walk there she must, for no hackney conveyances were abroad so late at night. And walk she did.

The distance to Frith Street was not a long one, yet Rose thought she would never cover it. She moved as if in a nightmare, shrinking back each time a man approached, and when he had passed her, hastening on in terror, hearing behind her the footsteps of an imaginary pursuer. She reached Piccadilly unmolested, however, and even ventured to slow down a little, until a woman, emerging suddenly from a doorway, laughed with coarse harshness and shouted out an insult. Then Rose, possessed by panic, began to run. Not many yards further she collided with a man, who also laughed and tried to hold her back. Rose broke away from him and ran on wildly, stumbling from time to time and clasping her jewel-case tightly. The man did not follow, but she still ran, until breathless and trembling, she came at last to Frith Street. There, she had paused a moment outside Number Seventeen to compose herself, regain her breath and straighten her crooked bonnet.

And now, left to herself in the close, shabby parlour, Rose had become the victim of bitter self-reproach. And of an even bitterer apprehension. What if Charles did not want her? This thought, though its humility was alien to Rose, obsessed her. Charles had changed, no doubt, and small wonder, since

he had been led so cunningly to believe her faithless. He might even be married. And if not that, he might have fallen in love. With that landlady person perhaps, that common flaunting creature. Rose started to weep. She had ruined herself by flying so precipitately from her home, by seeking a man in his lodgings so late at night and by preparing to throw herself on his mercy. She had ruined herself and perhaps Charles would not want her. The boy she had once coquetted with assumed, in Rose's nervous fancy, strange proportions. She longed for him to come, yet dreaded his arrival. He had changed, she felt sure, become a philanderer, a hard-hearted judge of women, a seducer even. Suddenly cold, Rose moved nearer the fire. She crouched over it shivering, a desolate frightened girl bereft of her vanity and self-satisfaction.

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Charles walked home from the Olympic, where London had given Vestris a royal welcome. Long before the doors opened and in spite of the rain, a great crowd had been waiting patiently outside the theatre; and at the moment of admittance the charge of people had resembled a miniature storming of the Bastille. Inside the theatre a happy pandemonium reigned. Even the occupants of the more expensive places seemed keyed up with excitement. The performance started amid groans, for it was not the play itself, but Vestris, the spectators wanted. And when at last the strains of "Home, Sweet Home" broke out, the audience, guessing the implication of this tune, burst into roars of delighted anticipation. Then Vestris entered. She even spoke her opening line, but not a soul heard it. The shouts of welcome drowned her words completely. Hats were thrown up, men unrolled their overcoats and flapped them wildly; one enthusiast snatched off his wife's lace cap and waved it, stuck on the point of his umbrella. The air rained bouquets, some of which, missing their mark, fell in the orchestra; while others struck the actors, and the rest heaped themselves into a veritable mountain of blossoms at Madame's feet. She was deeply moved, so much so, that persons

seated near the stage could see the glitter of tears upon her lashes. She waited, seeming half-dazed, until the clamour subsided slightly, then holding one especially lovely nosegay in her hand, stepped forward. But the thanks she attempted to express remained unheard, and only by an eloquent silence could she acknowledge London's adoration; so different from the cold criticism and brutal incivility from which she had suffered in America.

The play went on at last, but with many more interruptions, for besides according a warm welcome to Charles Mathews, the audience could not sufficiently express its joy in Vestris. They encored her songs, shouted out well-meant if distracting comments upon her every entrance, while the other players, gratified by this promise of returning prosperity to the little theatre, spoke their parts as best they could and endured the noisy interjections with the greatest of good humour.

There were, as Kitty had predicted, many guests in the Green Room. And Charles was late in leaving. He might indeed have been later had not the thought of Kitty's loneliness decided him suddenly to return and bear her company. So, without waiting for the very probable invitation to supper from Mr. and Mrs. Mathews, he had slipped away, and was now walking home at a fine pace, wondering what Kitty would have cooked for him, pleased at the prospect of her affectionate welcome. It was delightful, Charles thought, to be so well cared for; the repulse he had suffered on Christmas night rankled no longer, his appreciation of Kitty had more than survived it. He was thinking also of Thomas, smiling in anticipation of that enthusiastic play-goer's comments and of the innocent ones of Sally; and felt, as he turned into Frith Street, well satisfied both with his good friends and himself.

He let himself into the house, a little surprised that no light was burning in the basement; Sally and Thomas were still out then, no doubt regaling themselves with stout and oysters. Charles burst cheerfully into the parlour, observed the woman crouched beside the fire, only to assume her to be

Kitty, and, since he was by now exceedingly hungry, reserved his chief attention for the table. But not one single preparation for a meal appeared on it.

"What, no supper?" Charles exclaimed in chagrin. About to speak again, he stopped short while a cry less of joy than of astonishment escaped him. "*Rose!*"

She had turned as he entered, and now she started up. Her face was so white, her expression so imploring, that all Charles's protective instinct rose to support her. He stepped forward, holding his hand out, and Rose ran straight to his arms.

"Oh, Charles, dear Charles," she sobbed and clung to him.

"Rose! You here? But why—I don't understand—my love, how you tremble." Charles strove both to soothe her and to control his own agitation.

"Charles, do you love me still? Say that you do. Oh, say it, I beseech you!"

"Of course I love you, dear. How can you doubt it?" Charles spoke a trifle mechanically; he was too astounded just then either to feel or express great tenderness. Rose's presence in Frith Street was bewildering enough; even more so were her words of entreaty, her appeal to him, her abandon.

"Ah, thank God," she whispered; still weeping, she clung more closely to him.

Charles led her to the sofa and attempted to calm her. "Rose, my darling," he urged, "control yourself, I beg you. What is the matter? What has happened to distress you?"

Rose went on sobbing.

"Please tell me everything," Charles begged her, "and tell me above all how you came here."

"I ran away," she whimpered childishly. "I—I've left my home. Charles, you must take care of me now."

"I will, Rose. Indeed I will," he promised bravely. "But you *must* tell me what has happened. How did you reach here? Not alone surely? Not on foot? Your skirt and shoes are muddy."

"They should be. I did walk."

"Rose! At such a time of night. Now, tell me——"

"Don't question me any more, Charles, pray. I'll try to tell you." And Rose, checking her sobs, recounted the whole story.

"I thought," she said at last, "that you'd forgotten me. How could I think otherwise, dear, when Mamma had kept your letter? And so to please her I—I accepted Sir Harry."

"That devil!" Charles exclaimed in a fury. "He shall pay for it, never fear. I'll make him ask your pardon on his knees. I'll——"

"No, Charles, no. You'll not go near him. He does not matter now. What should I care for Harry Tempest once I've become your wife?"

"My wife?" Charles repeated her words blankly.

"You speak doubtfully," Rose accused him. "Perhaps you no longer want me."

"Why, Rose, you know that I do."

"I know nothing of the sort. In fact I believe you do not. I can tell it by your voice, your manner, your expression. My presence here is an embarrassment to you. Oh, I can see that clearly. And I know whom to thank for it. That woman!"

"What woman?"

"That vulgar creature. Your landlady so-called."

"Oh," said Charles thoughtfully, "so you've seen Kitty."

"Kitty! You are on familiar terms then. I might have known it. But how could you, Charles? You swore once that you loved me, and now to turn to that common girl!"

"Dear, do not speak so. Kitty is not common. And she has been very kind to me."

"Indeed? I can well imagine her sort of kindness. So don't defend her, pray, for I shan't listen. Oh, I was mad to come here, to believe you would be faithful. But don't concern yourself, Charles, for I am going." Even as she spoke Rose faltered and a hunted expression flashed across her face. Well

enough to talk of going, but where could she go to? Not into those murky streets again, ever; not to her home either for she was humiliated and disgraced. Where could she go to? And Rose, not knowing what else to do, began once more to cry.

Charles took her hands, and as he chafed them, spoke with affectionate urgency. "Rose, listen to me. You are quite mistaken about poor Kitty. And you should be more charitable. There has been nothing—nothing of what you fear between us. Oh, Rose, I swear it! And, as for loving you, my dearest, why, of course I do. But you cannot stay here. I'll fetch a coach and take you to your mother."

"To Mamma? Never!" Rose said vehemently. "And do not speak to me of her, pray. She was ready to sell me to that beast for his wealth and position. When I told her of his vile treatment of me she dismissed it as a mere drunken incivility. She saw no harm in me, her daughter, living intimately with such a libertine. And it was she, I am positive, who intercepted your letter. I shall never see Mamma again, ever."

Rose, it here occurred to Charles, seemed to have forgotten many things. Her former discouragement of him for one; for another, her own leaning towards wealth and position which had quite matched her mother's. But he did not dwell on this inconsistency for long. Rose in her distress was very lovely; her desolation stirred his chivalry; he could not but feel flattered that she had sought his protection. And no doubt these emotions showed themselves in his face for Rose's agitation subsided. She even smiled a little, and as she smoothed her ruffled curls said almost calmly, "I have taken you aback, dear Charles, I know. But whom else could I turn to? Who but you would offer me shelter and love?"

This flattered Charles the more. "You were right to come to me, dearest," he assured her.

"And we can be married?" Rose asked eagerly.

"I hope so. But we must wait, dear, until I can earn more money."

Rose opened her eyes widely. Was this her headstrong, eager Charles? His caution did not please her.

"There can be no question now of waiting," she said. "We must be married immediately."

"Immediately? But, Rose——"

"I am surprised you should hesitate," she interposed sharply. "I have no friends now. I—I am compromised. I need you."

"I will not fail you, dearest. Please trust me. But as to our marrying immediately, that, I am afraid, isn't feasible. I have so little money. Where could we live? And how? You are used to comfort, Rose, to luxury even."

"But I no longer care for such things." Rose meant for that one moment what she said. "I could have had luxury enough with Harry Tempest. And at what a cost! It's you I love, Charles, not what you can give me." She looked at him frankly, her eyes appealing, soft and ardent. And Charles surrendered swiftly. He took her in his arms and let her lie there. He kissed her fragrant hair, her eyelids, then, very reverently, her lips. And Rose was almost content. "Charles," she asked at last, "you will marry me?"

"I have already said so."

"But you will marry me now," persisted Rose, "at the very first moment possible?"

"Rose—I—cannot you understand the difficulties?" Charles began; then at another look from her eyes he wavered. "I will do whatever you wish, my darling," he added.

"You promise?" Rose demanded.

"Yes, Rose," Charles answered slowly, "I promise."

Rose with a little sigh of satisfaction nestled against him.

"And now, my love," said Charles, "what's to be done? You cannot stay here all night."

"Why not?" Rose's mood was reckless now; she wanted love and had even regretted the restraint of Charles's embraces; having gone so far, she was ready, under her emotion's stress, to go a little farther. To compromise herself completely. But

she could not frame such a proposal, and Charles did not help her.

"No," he repeated firmly, "you cannot stay here. It would be most imprudent."

"What do you suggest then?" Rose asked with some petulance. "An hotel?"

"No, indeed. You couldn't stay in such a place alone and it would not do at all for me to go there with you. What can we—ah, I have it." Charles, looking well pleased, continued, "I know the very thing, dear. I will take you to Madame Vestris."

"Vestris? A play-actress?" Rose spoke disdainfully. "Is that your idea of propriety?"

Charles stiffened. "Madame Vestris," he said coldly, "or Mrs. Charles Mathews, rather, is a lady of great distinction. I think her hospitality should honour you."

"Well, really," Rose began but checked herself; time enough later on, she thought, to wean Charles from these raffish friends of his. She did not intend that her husband should remain an actor.

"Very well," she agreed with deceptive meekness, "I will go with you to Madame Vestris if you wish it."

"That's capital." Charles was delighted and proposed running at once to a near-by livery stable which was kept open all night; but, on Rose refusing positively to be left alone, they set out in search of a coach together.

It was still raining heavily and the pavement was greasy. Rose shrank against Charles as a man swayed drunkenly towards them.

"Oh, pray walk quickly past that horrid fellow," she urged in alarm.

Charles did not walk faster, however, but stopped instead. For the man Rose spoke of was Philip O'Brien. The Irishman staggered by them and gave no sign of recognition, but Charles, as Rose tugged at his arm, heard O'Brien stumble and cry out feebly as he fell.

"One moment, dear," Charles said, "I must help him."

"Indeed you shall not," Rose declared, holding him more firmly. "Let the vile creature be. He is no concern of ours."

Charles tried to summon his courage; tried to tell Rose that the "vile creature" was his friend, one who had done him many a kindness. But the words would not come. He looked behind him, saw O'Brien struggle to his feet with difficulty and lurch towards his own doorway. All was well then. There had been no real need to offer assistance. Kitty would be down directly to let her father in and put him to bed. But Charles as he walked on beside Rose silently, was aware of his own meanness.

They procured a coach and drove in it to Chelsea to the house of Mr. and Mrs. Mathews which was still brightly lit, and where they were told by the servant that, although supper was over, some of the guests remained. Charles asked that Rose might be shown into an ante-room and begged for himself the favour of a moment's private conversation with Charles Mathews.

The servant complied with both requests; on returning from the drawing-room he told Charles that his master would be with him directly and, soon afterwards, Mathews himself ran smiling down the staircase, his hand held out in welcome.

"My dear Barty," he greeted Charles warmly. "This is delightful. I hunted everywhere for you to-night to invite you to supper. And here you are. Well, better late than never, although I fear there is but little left to eat."

"I—I haven't come to supper," Charles explained. "I've come instead to ask a favour of you, or of Mrs. Mathews rather."

"Out with it, then. But first come up to the drawing-room. You'll not refuse a glass of wine, surely."

"Indeed, I would rather not come up. You see, I—well, I am not alone."

"The plot thickens! Very well, young Barty, best get it off your chest."

Charles, with a very red face, told Mathews the bare essentials of his story. "And so," he said in conclusion, "as the

young lady—as Miss Clifford—is in this difficulty at home and as she cannot with propriety stay at Frith Street—I thought that you, that Mrs. Mathews——” Charles then became somewhat involved, aware for the first time that his request seemed rather a cool one.

But Mathews was by no means offended. “My dear boy,” he said cheerfully, patting Charles’s shoulder, “Eliza will be only too glad to accommodate this young lady. I will speak to her at once, and if you still refuse to join the company, why, then, do you wait with Miss Clifford.”

Charles, relieved and most grateful, went to join Rose in the ante-room while Mathews returned to his guests.

Some time elapsed before Vestris came downstairs. Rose, exhausted now and spiritless, lay in a great arm-chair before the fire, sipping languidly at the wine which had been brought in by a servant. But Charles had drunk two glassfuls and felt the better for them.

“It’s very late,” Rose complained peevishly. “Will this friend of yours never come? I want to go to bed.”

“You cannot expect Madame to desert her guests, Rose. They will, I am sure, be leaving shortly.”

“I hope so, indeed. The noise they make is monstrous,” remarked Rose tartly as a burst of laughter came from the staircase, followed by the rattle of carriage wheels in the street, the shouts of a footman and the sound of Mathews’s voice as he called out “good-night.”

“How rowdy such people are,” began Rose, but she got no further for the door of the ante-room opened and Madame Vestris entered.

If Rose had looked forward to patronising her hostess she met with a sharp disappointment. Vestris swept in like a queen, extending to her uninvited guest so dignified a courtesy that Rose, who had expected the actress to be raffish and painted, only a little superior off the stage to Kitty O’Brien, found that this handsome woman, nearing middle age and dressed with a rich discretion, awed her, making the spoilt

young beauty feel as insignificant as a schoolgirl. Meekly she responded to Madame's greetings, and permitted herself, after some brief conversation, to be led upstairs to a bedroom, the tasteful comfort of which astonished her still further. There was, she had to admit, nothing vulgar about either Mrs. Charles Mathews or her domestic appointments.

"There, child," said Vestris, "pray, make yourself at home. Hot water will be brought to you and anything else that you wish for. Will you not drink some hot soup or a *tisane* perhaps?"

"I require nothing, thank you," Rose answered with chilly politeness.

"You require a sound sleep, I am sure. So I will leave you. You are among friends here, remember. My husband and I are very fond of Barty and are glad to give you hospitality for his sake."

Rose hardly liked these words. Was she a waif to be sheltered, a nobody to be condescended to by a play-actress? "Barty?" she repeated with some slight return of spirit. "I presume you mean Mr. Baron."

At her lofty tone, the fine eyes of her hostess twinkled. "Why, yes, child, I do mean Mr. Baron. That is his stage name, you see—Charles Barty. You take an interest in his career, I am sure."

"I know little of such matters," Rose replied sulkily.

"Ah, well, you'll learn. And now I'll say good-night. Dream sweetly, child, and ring when you wake in the morning." With these words Vestris left Rose to herself.

Waiting only to thank Mrs. Mathews for her kindness, Charles resisted the offer of more wine and hurried away. He felt embarrassed and dreaded further inquiries.

"I do not like that girl," Vestris then remarked to her husband. "I trust that Barty will not commit the folly of marrying her."

"Young men in love are hasty," rejoined Mathews with a comfortable yawn.

"And fickle too, it seems. I had believed him interested in that sweet-humoured creature where he lodges."

"Kitty O'Brien? A little lower than Barty on the social ladder, eh?"

"And why not?" demanded Vestris with spirit. "She is a dear girl and would look after him properly. An actor should not choose a wife with too much refinement."

"Take a care, madam, or I might mention some of my reasons for marrying you!"

"Charles, do not jest on such a serious subject. I like Kitty O'Brien. And she, poor soul, loves Barty. A blind man could see it. As for this Miss—Clifford, is it?—she loves no one but herself."

"You judge harshly, Eliza, on so short an acquaintance."

"But rightly, none the less. She is a selfish girl, I'll wager, with nothing beyond her beauty to recommend her. And she looks down on us 'mummers.' My lady would have liked to patronise me had she dared."

"And I," said Mathews, smiling, "would have liked to see her attempt it."

"You're amused," his wife said sombrely, "but I am not. This business may break hearts."

"One heart, you mean. Poor Kitty's."

"Not only hers, I fancy. Now, Charles, come to bed, do."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Kitty

CHARLES had dismissed the coach and he welcomed, even in such wet weather, the long walk that lay before him; his mind, full of Rose's sudden arrival and her insistence upon a speedy marriage, was in a state of utter confusion. A dream had come true indeed, yet proved, in the very act of acquiring reality, less of an ecstasy than an embarrassment, Charles could not tell whether Rose's coming made him glad or sorry. While actually with her, he had fallen as of old under her spell, finding the girl, in her new dependence on him, more fascinating than ever. Now, as he strode alone through the rain, one doubt after another assailed him, until his spirits sank and his ardour grew as damp as his greatcoat.

To marry Rose had once been his ambition. To marry her at once would embarrass him sadly. He was earning by then the sum of three guineas a week, to which, by drawing to its full extent on Margaret's allowance, he could add another four certainly. But how could he maintain and satisfy Rose, used from her babyhood to every kind of luxury and indulgence, on an income of about three hundred and eighty-four guineas a year? Charles tried in vain to imagine her adjustment to a life in lodgings or in some small cottage, to the attention of a single servant-girl, to household economy, simple clothes and every sort of petty deprivation. She would never endure it. She belonged too essentially to the world of wealth and fashion to bear transportation into any other.

And yet, Charles asked himself, what else but marry her could he do? He had promised. Rose had fled to him in her distress, believing blindly in his fidelity, expecting to find his desire to make her his wife unaltered. He could not easily flout

so great a trust. And besides which, by resolving to play the prudent part, advising Mrs. Clifford of her daughter's whereabouts and engineering Rose's return home, he would undoubtedly drive her to the arms of Harry Tempest. And this Charles could not face. The man was a coarse libertine, who would make Rose's life hideous, and even should she escape Tempest himself, Mrs. Clifford would contrive somehow to wed her to just such another. Charles, as he walked, and thought all round the subject, saw but one single solution—he must comply with Rose's wish and marry her as quickly as possible. The more strongly wisdom forbade such a course the more eloquently did chivalry urge it. Yet, even in his resolution Charles felt very far from happy; his heart's desire had been granted him at such a time and in such a way as to bring with little joy.

So engrossing had been his hesitations and anxieties that he had almost reached home before finding time to give a thought to Kitty. Then Charles's conscience smote him. Without undue vanity he knew that she cared for him deeply and that her refusal of his offer on Christmas night had in no way changed an affection, which, if sisterly, was also tender. She had seen Rose, he knew; recalling the latter's bitter references to his "landlady" and "that common creature," he guessed that a strong antagonism existed between the two women already; and setting beside this his own deplorable reluctance to admit acquaintanceship with Philip O'Brien, Charles, examining his behaviour to these loyal friends, found it extremely shabby. He blushed on remembering how he had told Kitty of his growing indifference to Rose, blushed at his assurance to her of "being off with the old." With what little truth had he spoken, since Rose owned his whole heart. For it was hers, all of it. Of this fact, Charles reminded himself again and again, even while wondering why, if this were so, he had come so readily to make a proposal to Kitty. How fickle he had proved himself and what a turncoat!

But he was tired now, anxious to forget his problems in

sleep and most relieved to know, that, as the whole household at Frith Street would be in bed, all explanations must be left till the morning, or rather, it being morning already, until much later that day.

On entering Number Seventeen, Charles found a light burning brightly in the passage and as he stopped to light his candle, the parlour door was flung open and a man's voice hailed him noisily.

"That's him now, I'll wager," some one shouted. "And so it is. Well, Charlie Baron! Well, my little Quaker!"

Charles, staring with astonishment at the speaker, recognised him quickly. Jack O'Brien, handsome in a dark gipsy way, very much resembled his mother. But there was a dissolute, careless look about him now, which Charles, for Kitty's sake, was sorry to see. Jack's flushed face and loud voice showed all too plainly that he had been drinking.

But Charles, glad to see his old playfellow again, greeted him warmly, and Jack, after responding with some over-emphasis to this, literally dragged him into the parlour.

"Come along, Charlie!" he urged. "Let's take a look at you. Lord, man, how wet you are! Here's a drowned rat for you, sister."

"Come close to the fire at once and take those wet shoes off." By an eager concern for Charles's welfare, Kitty masked whatever uneasiness she might be feeling, while Charles, grateful for the noise and bustle, replied cheerfully:

"Oh, don't worry over me, Kitty. My greatcoat has kept me dry enough and my shoes are merely muddy. When did you blow in, Jack, and from where?"

"From America. Straight as an arrow. I got off the Southampton coach two hours ago and came home as fast as could be to be petted."

Charles, looking around the parlour which Rose had scorned, found it particularly inviting; Kitty had built up the fire, Lawrence slept placidly before it and the remains of a substantial supper lay on the table. He felt in anticipation a

pang of nostalgia for the time when this would be his home no longer.

"Take a drink, Charlie," Jack suggested, lifting a half-empty brandy bottle from the table; he had brought this in with him and had already done ample justice to its contents.

"A little only," said Charles, "and add some water. I'd like to drink your health, Jack, for I am very glad to see you."

Jack mixed some brandy and water as Charles directed, but took his own portion of the spirit without dilution. Then, seated, glass in hand, upon the edge of the table, he swung his legs carelessly, presenting to his sister's anxious eyes no very pretty picture.

"Here's to you then, Quaker." Jack tipped his glass up. "And to you too, Kit. In fact, to the pair of you. For it's just struck me that you should make a match of it."

"Don't be a fool, Jack," said Kitty sharply.

"I'm not that by any means. Have I not caught you blushing, miss, each time we've mentioned the Quaker? And didn't I see the look you gave just now when he came in? You fairly languished at him. Eh, Charlie, what about it? Am I correct?"

"I had hoped to hear some of your adventures in America." Charles evaded the question lamely.

"Oh, those will keep. And Kit here, has heard the best of them already." Jack tossed off his brandy and refilled the glass. "What's amiss now? You both look very foolish."

"Let's have no more of this nonsense," Kitty said, "and pray be more careful with that brandy. You've drunk over half the bottle."

"It's mine, isn't it? I brought it with me." And her brother gave Kitty an ugly look, as if this rebuke merely strengthened his desire to plague her. Jack O'Brien had lived wildly in America, a harshly hand-to-mouth existence, which had transformed him from a feckless youth into an undisciplined, coarse-thinking man. Sober, he was a good enough fellow, but drink inflamed him, to brutality almost,

and he had inherited an undue love of liquor from his father. So, now, while observing clearly his sister's distress, he felt no pity, but continued with a sullen persistence to provoke her. "Why can't either of you give me a plain answer?" he asked. "You've not been trifling with Kit's affections, I hope, Charlie."

"I hope not, either," Charles replied, and he felt unaccountably guilty.

It was Kitty herself, however, who attempted to settle the matter. "Since you're so curious, Jack," she informed her brother, "you had best know here and now that Charlie made me an offer of marriage and I refused it."

"Refused it, did you? Why? What made you such a fool? And when did this happen, pray?"

"On Christmas night," put in Charles, who hoped to end the discussion once and for all.

"On Christmas night, eh? So that explains it. Better try your luck again, Charlie. I'll wager Kit's answer will be a different one this time."

"Be quiet, sir," snapped Kitty, "and stop your meddling."

But Jack ignored her and turned to Charles. "You see," he resumed, "she couldn't very well accept you then. She hadn't heard the good news."

"What good news?"

"Will you mind your own business, Jack?" interposed Kitty angrily. "And, Charlie, pray go to bed. You must be tired and it's past four o'clock already."

"Now, wait a minute." Jack took the floor again, noisy and florid, yet a little grim as well. "I want to get this clear, Kit. I only learned that news myself, remember, by finding your letter for myself and reading it."

"Which you had no right to do, sir. Hold your tongue, I say."

"Why make a secret of that rascal's death?" asked Jack. "You should be shouting it to the house tops rather."

"What rascal?" Although Charles asked this question he had already guessed the answer.

"Why, her husband of course," Jack told him. "He's dead—the shabby rogue."

"Is this true, Kitty?" Charles demanded.

"Why, yes, it's true enough. But what can it signify? His death concerns no one, *no one*, I say, except myself."

"Kitty——" Charles faltered. But he said no more. He sensed rather than knew that this news might have made a great difference—had it come sooner. He looked earnestly at Kitty who met his glance frankly. Her eyes were sorrowful, yet she smiled. Between these two then, the matter might have been settled, settled quietly without the sting of reproach, without words even. For Charles had read in Kitty's expression her renouncement of all claim upon him, and had saluted her generosity silently.

But Jack, as he finished yet another glass of brandy, exclaimed loudly, "Bless you, my children. She's a widow now, Charlie, so nothing stops you. Take her, my boy, and be happy."

"How dare you, Jack?" flashed Kitty. "Don't heed him, Charlie. He's not sober."

"Maybe not," returned her brother, his eyes narrowing slightly; "but I'm sober enough to be heard. So you'll let me have my say out, sister, and not mount your high horse with me either. I've had your letters, haven't I, full of talk of this fellow? And I've seen you look at him with my own eyes. You say he asked you to marry and you refused him—not being free. Well enough. But now you *are* free and where is his famous proposal? Why don't he make it again, is what I say?" He swung round suddenly on Charles and asked him, "Have you been intimate with my sister?"

The coarseness of this question, put in a woman's presence, stung Charles to fury. "I have not," he answered vehemently, "and you can have small respect for her even to think so. Is that your opinion of Kitty?"

"Never mind my opinion of *her*. It's you who concerns me. Will you marry her now or won't you?"

"Jack, I forbid you—hold your tongue—be silent——"

But Charles checked Kitty's angry words and faced her brother. "What your sister has said is true," he told him coldly. "I did ask her to marry me, or rather, since she was not free at the time, to become engaged. And she refused."

"That may be so. But now that her good-for-nothing husband is dead, why don't you repeat your offer? Do that, and I'll swallow the rest of the story."

"I cannot," Charles said. He looked bravely at Kitty, who in a passion rounded on her brother.

"You foul-mouthed meddler," she cried, "you're drunk. Else even you would keep out of what don't concern you. As to Charles's offer of marriage—let him repeat it twenty times and I'll refuse it. Let him go down on his knees to me and I'll laugh. I'll never marry him—never! Now does that satisfy you, you prying fool?"

"Well enough as regards yourself," coolly replied her brother; "but I'd like just the same, to hear this notable offer. Or to hear why, if he could make it at Christmas, he cannot make it now. I'd like to hear your refusal too. It should be mightily amusing. Come, Charlie, you're an actor. Let's see the drama."

Then Charles lost his temper completely. "This is an outrage!" he stormed. "How dare you insult your sister? I advise you for your own good, Jack, to let the matter drop."

"For *my* good?" sneered Jack. "And yours, too, I fancy, young 'un. For I see it all now plain as a pikestaff. You asked my sister in marriage knowing well enough that she had a husband. And that cleared your precious conscience for what had gone before—and afterwards too, no doubt. Now that you hear she's a widow you take fright. You never meant to marry her—I'm certain of it Mr. High and Mighty Baron. She's good enough for your bed, but not——"

"You damnable liar!" shouted Charles.

"Prove me one then," Jack retorted, and struck him.

As Charles fell back a pace, his mouth bleeding, his hand

raised to retaliate, Kitty rushed in between, her concern all for him, her anger all for her brother. And Jack, it must be admitted, looked ashamed already.

"I'll not fight you, Jack," said Charles, suddenly calm. "We were good friends once, remember."

"Why should I let you hide behind that," muttered Jack, "if what I think is true."

"Now, listen, you drunken sot." As Kitty spoke she pushed her brother aside, and he, by no means steady on his legs, reeled up against the table. "You struck that blow for nothing," she went on. "Charles spoke the simple truth. But since you're so eager to brawl for my honour I can give you victims in plenty."

"What do you mean?" Jack stammered.

"I mean that before you start to defend a woman's virtue make sure that she still has any."

"Kit!"

"You'd be a laughing stock in many quarters, Jack, for such an exhibition. I can protect myself, thank you—when I choose to. You're quite mistaken in your notions, my poor blustering brother. I have no virtue left to speak of."

Jack stared at Kitty in a bewilderment almost pathetic. But she showed him no sympathy whatever. "Get out," she told him roughly, "get to your room, and sleep off that brandy. We O'Briens are a pretty crew, I must say. And for *you* to play the chivalrous over me! Lord, how that makes me laugh."

And laugh Kitty did, a wild bitter sound. Charles, very pale, a trickle of blood on his chin, stood motionless while Jack, attempting to recover himself, began to bluster, "I want an explanation of that, Kit. And I'll have it too. I'm your brother, aren't I, and——"

But Kitty did not let him finish. "Get out!" she repeated and her voice held a menace, "get to your bed. You'll be ashamed of this piece of work in the morning. Now, go."

And Jack, bemused and fuddled, obeyed her.

For a moment both Kitty and Charles kept silent, until as he saw her bring some water from the table to bathe his cut, he wiped the blood from his mouth and spoke. "Kitty," he asked her quietly, "what did you mean by what you said to Jack?"

"My meaning was clear enough, surely," she replied, steeping her handkerchief in the water. "Even he understood it. And you're quite sober."

"I understood your words, of course—but—but—I——"

"Be quiet, while I do this. There, that's better." Kitty dabbed the soaked handkerchief gently against his lip. "It's a nasty cut, certainly, but no great matter"

Charles pushed her hand away. "Let me speak, Kitty. And answer me like—like yourself. I hardly knew you when you spoke just now."

"So you were shocked, eh, Charlie? That was my natural self. The O'Briens are common people, don't forget it."

"No, Kitty, I'll not be put off so. As for what you said to Jack, I don't believe it."

"Oh, child, grow up!" Kitty exclaimed impatiently. "Don't be so innocent, so simple. I spoke the truth just now. So you'd better believe it. And yet——"

"And yet? What? Tell me, Kitty. Whatever you tell me I shall understand."

Kitty laughed again, still bitterly. "It matters very little now," she said, "whether you understand or no. But since we've been such good friends and since we're parting soon I'd like you to know——"

"Well, Kitty?"

"I'd like you to know that if I've sold myself it's been from necessity only."

"Kitty," Charles said softly; "dear Kitty."

She looked at him in wonder. "You're not disgusted then? You don't shrink from the thought of having spoken to me of marriage?"

"Why should I?" Charles asked her steadily. "I've no wish

to judge you. Or rather, I can't judge you. Because—because I love you."

"I love you"—the three words that Kitty on Christmas evening had waited for in vain.

Charles, having spoken them, paused, astonished, frightened, bewildered. And yet sincere. He had been shocked certainly into making this declaration, yet he knew somehow, without reasoning, that he meant it.

"Charlie," said Kitty soberly, laying her hand on his. "You've made me very happy. I'll not wait now to tell you all the mean straits I've been put to. I've not been on the town ever, please believe that. No," as he made a gesture of indignant remonstrance, "let me finish. There have been times, you see, with Pa as he is, and everything against us, when I've accepted assistance. And paid for it, Charlie. But never once, dear, since you came to live here. And," her voice changed and grew firmer, a little proud even, "I've kept my secret. I felt that I had a right to. I should have kept it even if—if you and I—but we'll not mind that now, Charlie. You know, I expect, that I have seen Miss Clifford."

"Yes," replied Charlie very low.

"She told me nothing," continued Kitty; "but I could see her agitation. She had come for you, had she not? Just as you dreamed she would."

"Yes, Kitty. Just as I dreamed she would."

"And you are to be married?"

"We—why, yes, we spoke of it."

"She's your first love, dear—and——"

Charles interrupted. "I know, Kitty, I know. And I thought until just now—oh, how can such things happen so swiftly? For I don't *think* that I love you—I know."

"What can you do then?" Kitty asked. Her voice was suddenly hopeful.

Charles looked at her, then at the ground. Clearly, without doubt or hesitation, and without sentimental confusion, he wanted not Rose but Kitty. But the straight-living, rigid

heredity that he hated rose up to rebuke him and rose to such purpose that he could hardly struggle against it, much less resist its commands. To relinquish pleasure for right—the Quakers Charles had fled from seemed to be hounding him, pushing him back on to the narrow path from which he had strayed so light-heartedly.

"I have to marry Rose," he told Kitty dully. "I—I gave my promise."

Kitty was in his arms now, sobbing out her protest; no longer caring for anything except her desire for his love; hating and fearing Rose; predicting the misery of such a reluctant marriage. She pleaded incoherently enough, but most piteously.

Charles held her closely. While he knew, in full tragic certainty, that Kitty possessed his heart, he seemed, on looking over her shoulder, to see the cold, virtuous eyes of his father. One did not break a promise, least of all in so sacred a matter. He had wanted Rose; he had wanted her rebelliously against John Baron's wishes, against Margaret's, against her mother's. And now she was his. He had promised.

Very gently, Charles disengaged Kitty's clinging arms from his neck. He kissed her face which was wet with tears, then blindly and without speaking another word, he left her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Margaret

A WEEK later Margaret Baron was summoned from her step-mother's room by the announcement of a visitor; the hour was early for any caller, and Margaret, astonished on hearing that she had been asked for by Mrs. Clifford, went down to the parlour where she found Rose's mother, dressed as usual in the height of fashion but apparently much agitated.

"Ah, Margaret, my dear," she exclaimed without even the preliminary of a greeting, "I felt I must come to you. You will help me, I know, and sympathise."

"Sympathise?" repeated Margaret, at a loss.

"Yes, indeed, since the catastrophe touches us both."

"Catastrophe? I do not understand thee, madam."

"Is it possible," Mary Clifford asked in evident amazement, "that you have not yet heard the news?"

"What news?" Margaret, still bewildered, began to feel apprehensive also.

"I must confess," continued Mrs. Clifford, "that I only heard it myself last evening. But as Rose has written to me I naturally thought that Charles——"

"Charles," Margaret interrupted her brusquely. "What of my brother, pray?"

"Then you do not know? My dear, prepare yourself to be shocked. For they are married."

"They—thee means that Rose and Charles are married?" Margaret grew very pale.

"They are indeed. And how it was contrived I do not know. For they both are under age. But they employed a complaisant clergyman, no doubt—there are plenty of *those* to be found! Not that it signifies now. The thing is done."

"Mrs. Clifford," asked Margaret, struggling for self-

command, "I beg thee to explain thyself more clearly. I can hardly grasp——"

"Good gracious, Margaret! What further explanation can be necessary? I say they are married."

Then as Margaret, without answering, looked blankly at her, Mary Clifford let loose the torrent of her exasperation. "I declare that you take it most calmly! Have you nothing to say? No condolences to offer me?"

"To offer *thee*?"

"Who else? But you cannot know, of course, what I've endured. First my Rose disappears—runs away, no less, to your brother, on the very eve of her wedding to Harry Tempest. Ah, there was a match!"

"But did she leave no word for thee?" asked Margaret. "Did she not tell thee that she had gone to Charles?"

"She tell me? No, indeed! She left me nothing but a pencilled scrawl to say that I need not be anxious. Anxious? I can assure you, Margaret, that I was in a frenzy. I had left Rose, in bed, sleeping peacefully as I thought. Every arrangement for the wedding was made. The presents all displayed, the caterers due at dawn, the guests as good as at the church already. And the bridegroom—ah, poor Harry! Although he took it most insolently, I must say, and seemed disposed to put the blame on me. I shall doubtless be cut by his set for months to come. But—where was I?"

"Rose left in the night then? Where did thee suppose she had gone to?"

"I supposed nothing. I was too dumbfounded, and small wonder. I repeat, everything was ready. The ceremony only a few hours off. Oh, what I suffered! But I did fancy afterwards that Rose might have gone to Priscilla. My sister you must know was not attending the wedding. She thought the match worldly or loveless or some such pious nonsense. So I thought that Rose had perhaps taken refuge with her. For Tempest, who is more to blame than he thinks, had frightened her sadly and——"

"I don't wish to hear about that. My brother alone concerns me. Did thee not even think it was to him that she had gone?"

"Such a notion never occurred to me. Could I easily imagine that Rose, *my* daughter, would compromise herself by going to a man's lodgings at midnight. And the girl is a very pretty actress, too, I must say, for I had thought her quite cured of that business and had believed her love-sickness all forgotten. How I have been deceived! You may judge my feelings when I read her letter last evening."

"What did she tell thee in the letter?" asked Margaret dully.

"That they are married, as I said," replied Mary Clifford, "and are in lodgings. In Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, of all shabby districts! I did not find her letter repentant either. It was written, she told me, at Charles's own request. Well, I can guess *his* motive."

"She caught him!" Margaret exclaimed in sudden anger.

"Caught him? That's pretty talk, I declare! What do you mean?"

"Thee has said that she compromised herself by going to him. What else but marry her could my brother do?"

"He jumped at the chance, you may depend upon it. What has *he* to offer? Has he not broken with your father and joined a low, miserable profession? Now he has taken advantage of Rose's folly and counts on my forgiving her."

"Since my brother has married thy daughter," Margaret said, "thee may take it that he loves her—or thinks he does."

"You are very high and mighty! But what concerns me most is what you propose to do."

"To do?"

"Why, yes. Here's my girl, my Rose, who might have married brilliantly a dozen times and who has thrown herself away——"

"That may be thy opinion, madam, but I——"

"Well, well, I meant no offence. But do consider it sensibly, pray. Your brother is a mere boy, he has quarrelled with his

father and thinks he can earn a living on the stage. Now that they are married such a state of things cannot continue."

"Nor need it continue if thee knows how to prevent it," put in Margaret.

"If I know how to prevent it. That's cool upon my word! I am the injured party. What of your father?"

"This marriage cannot in any way involve Papa. He never speaks of my brother."

"But that is absurd. And exaggerated. And so extremely like John Baron. The boy has been a little wild, no doubt. Boys always are. But surely, if he mends his ways and asks his father's pardon——"

"No," Margaret interrupted her visitor to say, "it would make no difference whatever. My father has finished with Charles."

"But you, my dear, have not," said Mrs. Clifford. "I can see that quite plainly. And your father would listen to *you* if you spoke on behalf of your brother."

"Thee seems most anxious, madam, that this should be done."

"Indeed, I am anxious. For I haven't *your* gift of composure! Do you not understand that Charles has married Rose."

"I understand that most clearly."

"Then you will intercede with your father?"

"No." Margaret gave her answer firmly.

"No? But, my dear Margaret! I am at a loss to understand you."

"Then let me explain myself. Thee says that this marriage displeases thee. It displeases me also."

"Quite, my dear, quite. But the harm is now done."

"Perhaps. But the position remains unaltered."

"Unaltered?" repeated Mary Clifford incredulously.

"I should rather say," amended Margaret, "that the position between Charles and his father remains unaltered. Papa would be no more likely now to forgive him. Less, in fact. He does

not approve of Rose. And I can guess it is for her sake that thee wishes this reconciliation, not for my brother's."

"Isn't that natural?"

"Very natural indeed. But I am afraid I cannot help thee. Charles must manage his life as best he can. And as Rose has chosen him, she must manage hers also."

"Do you suggest," demanded Mrs. Clifford, "that I should permit my daughter to live in low class lodgings as the wife of a struggling actor?"

"I suggest nothing, madam. As thee has the means to help Rose, I am sure thee will do so. But my father will do nothing."

"And you won't plead with him?"

"No."

"Then will you plead with Charles instead? Will you beg him to give up the stage, to establish himself in a respectable profession? I dare say by doing so he would soon pacify his father. You will surely help me there, Margaret?"

"No, madam. I never see Charles. I can do nothing."

"Upon my word! I would never have believed this of you. So cold, so little heart! And yet, you used to dote upon that boy. You even broke your engagement to——"

"Please," Margaret checked her. "We will not speak of that now. I repeat that I cannot help thee."

"*Will* not, you mean! Well, I—I shall approach your father."

"Will thee?" There was a faint flicker of amusement in Margaret's hostile eyes.

"I—but I suppose it would be useless. For of all the narrow, stiff-necked——"

"Abuse will not help matters," Margaret pointed out.

"Then I will see Priscilla. Perhaps she may succeed in ending this nonsensical quarrel."

"Perhaps. But pray understand this, madam. There is nothing to be gained for Charles from his family. If thee chooses to assist Rose thyself, that is a different matter."

"It is disgraceful," moaned Mrs. Clifford, "that the child

should have so degraded herself. And as to assisting them—or her—I shall make it a condition that Charles leaves the stage.”

“As thee pleases,” replied Margaret coldly, “and if thee will excuse me now, I must return to my step-mother. She is not well this morning.”

“Oh, I am going, never fear. I am bitterly disappointed in you, Margaret.”

Margaret was silent, until as Mrs. Clifford prepared to leave, she asked her with quick malice, “Has it occurred to thee that as both Rose and Charles are under age, the marriage might not be valid. I know very little of such things. But it might be annulled.”

“Annulled!” Mrs. Clifford’s voice rose to a scream. “Annulled, when they have lived together as man and wife? Are you mad, Margaret, to make such a suggestion? Think of the scandal.”

“As Charles is no longer looked on as a member of our family, the scandal would hardly hurt us.”

“Of all the cold-blooded selfishness! I would never dream of such a thing. My girl would be ruined.”

“Then, pray, forget what I said,” replied Margaret. “It was a mere suggestion. No one need act upon it. And now, I must really leave thee.”

“I am not surprised, Margaret,” was Mary Clifford’s parting shot, “that you have remained unmarried. For there isn’t one spark of romance in you. Even I, with all my anxiety and anger and disappointment, have enough sensibility to feel for the poor young creatures.”

“That must be a great comfort to thee, madam,” returned Margaret coolly as she rang for her visitor to be shown out.

Once alone, Margaret’s manner changed so completely that not even Mary Clifford would have thought her composed or heartless; instead of returning to Sophia she paced the parlour floor, overcome by a veritable storm of emotion. Charles married! Nothing that her brother had yet done could equal

this. To Margaret, who for so long had nursed her love for him, his alliance with Rose Clifford seemed a betrayal. Rose! That girl among all girls. So selfish, vain and worldly and yet so immune from suffering. Born to be loved, to play havoc, to be conscienceless. How fiercely did Margaret hate her now, with what a desperate deliberation did she scheme how to injure her.

Since Charles had left home Margaret had grown more bitter, more thrown in upon herself, less rational. John Baron had not kept his promise, and, far from becoming more light-hearted, more companionable, had become even more dourly exacting; having secured his daughter, he had proceeded to tyrannise over her also. She must always be near him, or if not, he must at least know always where she was. His pleasure in her company seldom showed itself now and he would read for hours in her presence without once addressing her; yet his study seemed unbearable if she left it, and he even grudged at times her ministrations to his ailing wife. Only in her thoughts was Margaret free, and these were seldom, if ever, tranquil.

The Bryanston Square household, never a very merry one, was now much less so, for Charles's high spirits, although so often crushed, had brightened it greatly. William John, wrapped in his books, seemed the most contented member of the family; Janey, after months of idle fretting, was now occupied with plans for her wedding and in complaining because this event had been postponed until April. She found some consolation certainly in the staid wooing of Friend Burton, but not enough; for it was less the man himself Janey wanted than an establishment to call her own. Sophia, more nearly a genuine invalid now than ever before, thought only of herself, and a little perhaps of William John, whose patience with his peevish mother remained unabated.

All the family then except Margaret had their own concerns—her father his business and his piety; William John, his reading; Janey, her solemn lover and her impending marriage; Sophia, her ailments. Only Margaret had nothing, was at the

behest of them all, and yet, with all her duties, lonely and dull, missing Charles constantly and finding her one distraction in visiting Daniel Ellesmere's motherless children, her one solace in such news as her cousin was able to give her of her brother.

And now this solace was to be taken from her. Margaret, as she told herself grimly, would hear no more news of Charles; for as long as his life was linked with Rose's she did not even wish to. Her brother was lost to her, unless she could contrive by some means or other to separate him from his young wife.

Later in the day, leaving Sophia in Hannah's care, Margaret set out to call on Daniel. She had hoped to talk with him alone; but William John, on seeing the carriage, asked where his step-sister was driving to and offered to go with her. Margaret had small wish then for company, but she accepted William John's, not choosing to stress the importance of her visit to Daniel and hoping that her cousin's children would monopolise her companion, who was a great favourite among them.

She found, however, on reaching Bishopsgate Street that the children were gone to a party and Daniel, accustomed to talking of Charles freely before William John, took both brother and sister into his library.

After a few generalities, Margaret, believing William John to be absorbed in a book, lowered her voice slightly and said to Daniel, "I have something to tell thee, cousin."

"About Charles?"

"Yes."

"Then I think that I know it already," Daniel told her. "He is married." William John looked up from his book. He made no comment, however, and Daniel continued, "Charles informed me of this himself only yesterday, and knew of course that I should pass on the news to thee."

"Did he send me no special message?" Margaret asked.

"No special one, I fancy," replied Daniel. "But his love as he always does. What message had thee in mind?"

"I hardly know. Although I had hoped that he—but no

matter." Margaret frowned and was silent for a moment before saying curtly, "I shall be sending him no more money."

"Thee will be sending him no more money?" Daniel repeated. "Why, Margaret, how is this? Why should thee discontinue Charles's allowance now, just when he will need it so badly."

"That is his own concern," she answered. "He should have thought more carefully before taking such a rash step. To marry! At his age, too, and in that walk of life. And——" She hesitated.

"I think thee meant to add—and above all to marry Rose Clifford," Daniel said reproachfully. "I am sorry, Margaret, to find thee so small-minded."

"Small-minded?"

"Yes, indeed. Had Charles married some other woman, thee would be far less angry. So why not confess it?"

"Maybe so. But thee are quite mistaken in calling me angry. I have done with Charles, that is all."

"Precisely. And why? Because he has gone against thy wish. Is that not so, cousin?"

"How can thee say so? Has he not often done that before in other matters? By going on the stage, by——"

"No," broke in Daniel, "he has not. For in those matters, Margaret, thee did not feel so strongly. To prevent Charles marrying Rose was thy real wish. Thee even told me as much at Longdale. He could have done anything else, committed crimes even, without causing thee to abandon him. Come now, admit it."

"And so I do," she replied proudly. "I have always detested Rose. Her influence upon Charles is bad. And I suspect she meant from the first to have him."

"And he to have her, no doubt. But tell me, to what purpose does thee deprive him of this money?"

"Should I reward him for committing such a folly?" she asked sullenly.

"Come, Margaret. That is not sincere. There can be no

question of rewarding him by this money. He has been paid it regularly now for more than a year. And has come to count upon it, too, poor fellow. Had thee said to punish him for committing such a folly thee would have been more honest."

Margaret said nothing.

"To punish *her* would be more honest still, eh, Margaret?" suggested Daniel.

William John who had been listening intently laid down his book. "I thought thee loved Charles," he observed mildly to his sister.

She rounded on him. "Why must thee meddle? I had wished to talk to Daniel privately. Since thee are here, do, pray, at least be silent."

"William John is interested, only naturally," said Daniel. "And he has asked thee a question. He believes, and I do too, that thee loves Charles. What can thy motive be then if not to injure Rose?"

"I contracted to support my brother," retorted Margaret, "not his wife also."

Daniel, after a pause, spoke with some sternness. "To say that thee supports thy brother," he reminded Margaret, "is hardly correct. Thee helps him, I know. But Charles has made great efforts lately towards supporting himself. As I have often told thee he does not spend all that thee gives him, and I am looking after the sum he has managed to save. He intends ultimately to refund this to thee. Now he is married. His marriage, if a folly, is certainly not a sin. I should have expected to find thee all the more eager to help him."

"Thee would have been wrong, Daniel."

"But what is thy object then? To reduce Charles to such penury that he cannot support a wife?"

As this was indeed Margaret's exact object, she made no answer, and it was William John who spoke instead. "But there can be no question of penury," he said to Daniel. "Rose's mother will help them surely."

"She will," Margaret said quickly. "She has already told me so."

"In that case," Daniel seemed relieved, "this decision of thine is a mere whim, cousin. But I still wish thee would continue the allowance and not make Charles a pensioner, or very nearly so, on Mrs. Clifford."

"But cannot thee see," began Margaret, "that that is why——" She hesitated.

"Why what?" asked Daniel.

Once again, Margaret made no answer. She could not. For all her certainty of what she meant to do, she could not easily confess her selfishness to Daniel. Put baldly, her plan sounded too ugly, too malicious. How could she tell Daniel of her scheme to throw Charles on to the mercy of his mother-in-law; so to place him that he must choose between taking Mary Clifford's bounty and striving to support Rose upon an actor's salary? For this was Margaret's intention. Positive that Charles would, upon condition of his leaving the stage, accept no assistance from Mrs. Clifford, she could see the end of his marriage already. Rose, unable to endure poverty, disgusted by the strange, shabby life they would lead and by her husband's theatrical associates, would surely leave him. This must happen. It *had* to happen. For, with Charles set at liberty, Margaret could again build on his reunion ultimately with herself; on the time when she and her brother would once more be loving companions. This was the dream that Margaret in captivity to her father was constantly dreaming; this the picture her eager fancy had painted; and if they were spoiled what would remain for her to live for?

Piteously she looked at Daniel but his expression was hard and disapproving. He did not understand her, would have thought her morbid and weakly selfish if he had. He turned away from her now, without speaking, and leaning against the mantelpiece gazed glumly into the fire.

But William John said quietly, "Thee are so mistaken, Margaret. And yet, I can understand thee."

"*Thee* can understand?" she asked in surprise, for she never confided in this aloof, studious brother.

"It's plain enough," he answered. "*Thee* resents nothing that Charles does, for as long as he remains free; for as long as *thee* believes no part of his love is taken from *thee*. Daniel is right in saying that it is Rose whom *thee* wishes to punish. But as I said before, her mother will help them."

"And does *thee* think," flashed Margaret, "that Charles will accept her help? Or agree to give up the stage as she will most certainly urge him to do?"

"No," replied William John, "I do not think so."

"Nor do I," Margaret said, "and that is the reason I——" She met her brother's glance, and coloured. She had almost forgotten Daniel.

"Do not explain," William John said softly. "*Thee* might regret it." She knew then that he had read her thoughts and had indeed understood them.

But Daniel understood only a little. Margaret, as usual, on the subject of her brother was hardly sane. She wanted, stupidly and unthinkingly, to be revenged upon him for going against her wishes. She was crudely jealous of the girl whom Charles had married. Daniel, so sane himself, shuddered. Margaret, whom he had once loved, who should, with her capabilities and intelligence, have been so noble a creature, seemed, in some matters, possessed. With her, to love was to own and she had inherited this ugly trait from her father. How pitiless, thought Daniel, had their manner of loving made both John and Margaret Baron. The father ready to sacrifice her whole life by keeping her near him; the daughter discarding a lover for Charles's sake, then vanquished in turn by John, and scheming now to punish Rose because Charles loved her. The pity of it!

Daniel, as if to clear his head of confused, bitter thoughts, shook it, before saying coldly to Margaret, "Since thy mind is made up, cousin, no more need be said. I am sorry to find *thee* so hard. But perhaps when the first shock of Charles's marriage

is over thee will reconsider thy decision. There is no message, I gather, for thy brother?"

"None," Margaret answered, but her eyes had filled with tears.

"Thee can give him my love, Daniel," said William John, "and wish him well. Shall we go home, sister?"

Margaret nodded. She did not trust herself to speak. But she was glad that William John so clearly understood her; even more glad that Daniel did not. Better far that he should believe her resolve to be some spiteful whim, easily altered. He despised her for that even, but if aware of the full extent of her harshness, he would hate her, too. And Margaret could not have borne Daniel's hate easily.

"Come, Margaret," said William John. Suddenly compassionate, he put his arm about her.

When they had gone, Daniel sat on alone in his library. He felt most desolate, missing Catherine, missing the image he sometimes permitted himself to make of Margaret; an image, most dissimilar, he reflected sadly, from the original. And yet—Daniel sighed. He had cared for two women and both, in a different sense, were dead. His good Catherine, whom he had esteemed so placidly, was in her grave; Margaret, whom he had once desired, was almost equally buried—not underground certainly, but beneath the weight of her misguided, ill-controlled affections. He must think of her no more, but one thing he would do. He would continue, from his own pocket, to pay Charles's allowance and so spare Margaret the pain eventually of having impoverished her brother.

At length Daniel heard his children's voices on the staircase and went out eagerly to greet them. "Come up, my pets," he called, "Papa is very dull. Come quickly, all of you, and tell me about the party."

They ran in laughing—three boys, and one pretty little girl, who climbed on Daniel's knee to feed him with the sweetmeats she had filched from the festive tea-table for Papa. Later, most unreasonably, as they played a riotous game of Blind Man's

Buff together, Daniel pictured Margaret among his children, as she sometimes was, pictured her laughing as they clung to her skirts, or gathering up the youngest one to kiss him. And in spite of everything this picture filled Daniel with longing.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Married Man

CHARLES had married Rose on a Saturday; and since he had been excused upon his wedding night from attendance at the Olympic, it was not until Monday evening that his wife became aware of the main disadvantage of having married an actor. After an early dinner Charles started for the theatre while Rose, solitary in the small parlour of their lodgings, was left to repine a little, to consider her situation and dwell on her hopes of improving it.

Earlier that day, at Charles's request, she had dispatched a letter to her mother, and in spite of her previous censure of Mrs. Clifford, Rose felt very glad now that she had written. She had no doubt but that her mother would forgive her, would visit her shortly and put all that was wrong to rights. An hour spent alone in the small, common-place parlour had strengthened Rose's already half-formed resolve that matters could not continue thus; not only was it impossible for her, even with Charles, to endure so circumscribed and shabby an existence but there was not, as she triumphantly reminded herself, the smallest reason why she should do so. Mrs. Clifford, once recovered from her first vexation and chagrin at the marriage *manqué* with Harry Tempest, would come to her daughter's aid; would facilitate the young couple's removal from Henrietta Street, and so contrive their affairs that Charles must leave the stage.

Charles, as Rose knew, had called that morning upon Daniel Ellesmere to inform him of their marriage; she did not count, however, upon receiving either assistance or cordiality from her husband's family—the Ellesmeres, more closely related to herself than to Charles, would undoubtedly be civil—

but not the Barons. Charles's father was an old stick-in-the-mud, ridiculously prejudiced and religious, William John a nonentity, while Margaret and Janey both disliked her. No, thought Rose, with quite altered feelings now towards Mrs. Clifford, it was Mamma whom she must look to for support and kindness. Mamma who would liberate her from this dreadful place.

The lodgings certainly were not palatial; the landlady, Mrs. Hardwick, was bleary of eye and smelled strongly, in Rose's opinion, of gin. But Charles, who had removed himself from Frith Street on the morning following his sad scene with Kitty, was tolerably well satisfied with this new abode, even though the rent, for all Rose's disdain, was much beyond his purse. He foresaw indeed, that not only would every penny of his salary and his allowance be spent, but that he might even be obliged to avail himself of some of the money which he had placed in Daniel's keeping with the hope of returning it eventually to Margaret. He had no intention, however, of doing this if the necessity could by any means be avoided.

During the hasty preparations for his marriage, Charles's spirits, with the elasticity of his years, had risen. He had, moreover, a great deal to do. A clergyman to perform the ceremony must be found and—Rose having refused most petulantly to consider any delay—a licence procured. Charles had no really sensible person to advise him, or rather to give him such advice as might be palatable to Rose; Madame Vestris, confirmed in her bad opinion of his choice, offered, in the direction of hurrying the business through, no help whatever; while Mathews, if less censorious, and frankly acknowledging Rose's beauty, added to his wife's plea his own that they should wait a little before taking so irrevocable a step as marriage.

But Rose would not wait; and Charles, in his own mind, was divided; he had on the one hand no wish to add the scandal of a clandestine marriage to his other offences against respectability, as the word was understood by his family; on the

other, he inclined strongly towards obeying the dictates of chivalry and completing, by marrying Rose quickly, her salvation from Harry Tempest. Chivalry, reinforced by the fact that his promise had been given, won a comparatively easy victory over wisdom and sustained Charles to some extent in his distress at having discovered too late how dearly he could love Kitty. His mind made up and on the advice of a young actor playing at the Olympic, he approached a clergyman in that neighbourhood, who, if he suspected a runaway match, had a freedom from curiosity which was notorious. Charles's friend had cautioned him to give both his own age and Rose's when applying for the licence as being twenty-one or over, and had assured him that no awkward questions would be asked. This proved to be the case and although Charles, once again at loggerheads with his upbringing, could not, particularly in so serious a matter, lie easily, Rose, with a gaily feminine lack of scruple, thought the plan a most excellent one.

The young actor agreed to give the bride away, an office which Charles would have preferred to see performed by Charles Mathews, but which, sensing the disapproval of this good friend, he did not venture to suggest to him. By extending their hospitality to Rose until her wedding morning, Mr. and Mrs. Mathews, as Charles freely admitted, had done all that could be expected of them in the circumstances; theirs was not the form of censure which showed itself by interference and, having once voiced their doubts, both husband and wife were silent on the subject.

Rose spent the money she had brought with her on various necessary garments, some less necessary trifles, and on a gown pretty enough to be married in. Charles found her appearance exquisite, but she herself was so dissatisfied with the enforced modesty of her purchases that she even considered a visit to Howell and James in Regent Street, where her mother had a credit; but on reflection this project was discarded, for fear that one of the salesmen might mention, on chancing to see Mrs. Clifford, that her daughter had been there.

The marriage ceremony passed off easily enough, and on their wedding night Rose, lying at last in Charles's arms, was happy; knowing for perhaps the first time in her life utter contentment, ceasing for those few hours to strive after vanity and pleasure. Charles, too, for a little while was happy. Rose's attraction for him remained strong enough to drive all connected thought from his head; but afterwards with his young wife peacefully asleep, her head upon his breast, the weight of his responsibilities and anxieties overcame him, and he lay awake in the darkness filled with a bleak longing for Kitty.

Thomas had not accompanied his master to the new lodgings but had agreed, at Charles's earnest request, to stay on with the O'Briens and to gratify at the earliest moment his wish to marry Sally. Charles was to make use of his services during the day and so to increase his salary that Thomas could, unembarrassed, continue as Kitty's lodger; for thus only could Charles make her some trifling recompense. The additions to his expenses seemed to be increasing daily, but this particular extravagance was one that he would not forgo.

Charles, returning on the third night of his marriage to his lodgings, found Rose looking fretful and somewhat dishevelled. With a French novel to distract her, she had spent the whole evening huddled close to the fire; had drunk her tea in solitary discontent, snubbed Mrs. Hardwick's efforts at conversation, and was half-asleep in her chair when Charles came home at last.

"Poor little love, how tired you are!" he said gently, bending down to kiss her.

"What time is it?" asked Rose, blinking. And on seeing the clock, she added with some pettishness, "What an hour, to be sure! Are you always so late, Charles?"

"No, dear. I was playing in the after-piece to-night. Yet it is not so very late for you, surely. You must often have stayed up dancing until long after this. It is not yet one o'clock."

This remark was hardly a tactful one and Rose pouted.

"Dancing. That is altogether different. But here have I spent hours and hours in this pokey place with not a thing to amuse me."

"Was your book so dull, then?"

"It is diverting enough in a way. All French novels seem much the same. And I can never read for long, it tries my eyes. La, how stiff I feel! Do let us go to bed."

"Is there no supper?" Charles asked forlornly.

"Supper? Are you hungry?"

"Well, dearest, we dined at five, as you know. And I am always ready to eat something after the theatre. I thought you might have told Mrs. Hardwick. But never mind, love. I should have told her myself."

"I never thought about it," Rose admitted. "And I don't fancy talking to that horrid old woman. She eyes me so inquisitively and I am sure that she drinks. I detest this place, Charles."

"We'll move, my darling. But you must just give me time to look around. It doesn't signify about the supper."

"Take some of these," Rose said, indicating a very handsome box of sweetmeats that lay beside her.

"Here's splendour!" Charles said smiling, although he could hardly find in the box's sickly contents an adequate substitute for supper. "Where did this come from?" he asked Rose, eyeing the rows of dragées, candied fruit and chocolate drops with no great relish.

"I bought it," Rose answered carelessly. She bit into a dragée, then apparently disappointed with the flavour, threw the better part of the sweetmeat into the fire.

"Bought it?" Charles repeated. "But you told me that the last of your money was gone."

"I took a guinea from your bag," was Rose's placid reply, "and sent the servant-girl out to buy this box. She grumbled at being taken off her work, so I gave her five shillings. You know how very disobliging such people are. Try one of these cherries."

Charles was taken aback. He had put what remained of his money into a small bag, which he had placed in the bottom of the wardrobe; and only that evening on his way to the theatre had regretted the imprudence of leaving anything of value unlocked in strange lodgings, but he had quietened his anxiety by the thought that Rose was at home. It had never occurred to Charles that his wife might herself take the money.

Dismayed and a little vexed that his precious store had been raided for no better purpose than to buy confectionery and so disproportionately to reward a servant-girl, Charles still employed self-restraint. "I am sorry that your evening has been so dull," he said. "Why not come with me to the theatre to-morrow and pay a visit to the Green Room."

"I should hardly care for that," Rose replied.

"Dearest, why not? It would give me so much pleasure to present you to my friends at the theatre. And Mr. and Mrs. Mathews you know already and like."

Rose shrugged her shoulders. "You assume a good deal, Charles," she said coldly. "Mr. Mathews I do perhaps like a little. He is quite a gentlemanly person—for an actor. But I do *not* like his wife, and she, I can assure you, returns the compliment."

"You're mistaken, love. I'm certain of it."

Rose smiled at Charles lazily. She had no wish just then to quarrel; and, being determined that their life would soon be altered, she decided to humour her husband. "If it would please you," she told him, "I will come to the Green Room to-morrow. As I've never been in such a place before, I might find it diverting. I shall be very glad, of course, to meet your friends." And Rose recollecting with pleasure that secrecy was no longer needful, resolved to pay a visit next morning to Howell and James, where, by pledging her mother's credit, or by obtaining one for herself, she would purchase an outfit which would astonish the queer creatures at the Olympic; for Rose always liked to shine even among those persons whom she considered beneath her.

"I would prefer company of any kind to sitting here," she said to Charles. "I have never in my life spent such a long, tedious evening."

It occurred to Charles that his wife might have beguiled some part at least of her tedium by paying attention to her appearance; her dress looked crushed and tumbled, her face reddened by the heat of the fire, her hair untidy.

But before he could point this out Rose announced that she was going to bed, and bade Charles stay where he was until she called him.

She spoke arbitrarily with no hint of a concession that he might be more fatigued than she was, and, blowing her husband a kiss, she left the room, going to their sleeping apartment, which adjoined the parlour.

When Charles was alone. he sat down before the fire to await Rose's pleasure and to think somewhat gloomily of finance. How, he asked himself, were they to manage? If only Rose would be different, more easily satisfied, less insistent on the acquisition of useless trifles. Three hundred and eighty-four pounds a year was by no means a penurious income. It was even, properly laid out, a comparatively respectable one—at all events for a young man in the theatrical profession—to begin his married life on. But, if Rose continued to demand foolish gewgaws such as the great satin-covered box of sweetmeats, how long would the money last? Charles, even while urging his wife to write to her mother, neither expected nor desired any help from that quarter. He had wished the letter sent merely because, having estranged his own family, he hoped that Rose would not do likewise. But he now began to wonder whether, in the event of Mrs. Clifford offering her daughter a dress allowance, he would not be well-advised on the whole to permit Rose's acceptance of it; for he would never by his own efforts provide his wife with a quarter even of the finery she considered essential. Not out of three hundred and eighty-four pounds a year certainly. And yet, Charles reflected sadly, with what merry insouciance would Kitty

have lived with him on such a sum, and have contrived to dress herself from it as well.

He tried not to think of this, and to stifle any disloyal feelings that he might have towards Rose. He ate two candied cherries, thoughtfully and without zest, and yawned, wondering how soon his wife would summon him.

It was some while, however, before she did, and Charles, on going, thoroughly tired, to the bedroom saw that Rose had employed the time by making ample amends for her former disorderly appearance. Her nightgown, in its wearer's opinion but a poor, trashy thing, was delicately diaphanous; a little jacket of lilac-coloured silk covered Rose's shoulders but did not conceal her bosom. She had powdered her face and arms, touched her lips with a rosy salve, and brushed her red-brown curls until they glistened. As Charles entered the room the sweet familiar perfume of violets reached him, and as he paused on the threshold to look at Rose his senses quickened. She stood before the toilet-table, facing him, making an oasis of brilliant beauty in the dim, frowsty apartment. Her eyes shone, her breath came and went quickly, and she revealed with complete candour her longing for Charles.

When he had looked his fill at her, Rose smiled at her husband. She threw aside the little jacket, ran with an almost wanton grace to the bed and lay there, her white arms stretched above her head, her lips still smiling.

"Rose!" Charles, compelled by her beauty, followed; sitting down beside his young wife, he drew her to him and put his lips gently to her own eager ones.

"Why so timid, Charles darling? I will not break, you know." And with a wild little laugh Rose pressed herself against him, her eyes closed now, her body promising surrender.

"Rose!" Charles spoke her name again, this time in a husky whisper. And he forgot his anxieties, forgot Kitty even, in his instinctive response to his wife's fascination.

But Rose did not go to the Olympic. In the morning a letter came from her mother, promising to visit Henrietta Street that evening, and Charles returned after the play to find his wife, not dull or sleepy this time, but bright-eyed and very wide awake. She had remembered to bespeak his supper, and while eyeing with some distaste the cold dishes provided by Mrs. Hardwick, she sat affectionately by her husband while he ate.

Charles was in good spirits also. He had heard a rumour that night to the effect that Madame Vestris contemplated leasing Covent Garden Theatre for the next season.

"That's famous news, isn't it?" he asked Rose eagerly.

"Is it, dear? Why? One theatre surely is much the same as another."

"Oh, Rose, how can you say so? You know that at the Olympic we only do extravaganzas and burlettas and that kind of thing."

"Yes, I suppose you do," she agreed abstractedly, "but I have never thought much about it."

"But you will now, won't you, because it means so very much to me."

"Why should it mean so much, Charles?"

"Can't you understand? I have had so little experience as yet and hardly any in Shakespeare. And they'll do his plays at Covent Garden, of course. As well as a great many other first-rate pieces. So I'll have the chance at last to show what I can do. Oh, Rose, if you only knew how I long to play in Shakespeare."

"Mamma has been here," was Rose's reply to this—an apparently irrelevant one.

"Why, confound my stupidity!" Charles exclaimed. "I had forgotten all about her visit. Tell me what happened. Is she so very angry?"

"She is put out, of course, and sadly disappointed."

"Why yes, dear, I suppose so. She could hardly be otherwise. But we'll show her, won't we, Rose, that she need

not regret Harry Tempest. Just wait till I get to Covent Garden——”

“Oh, Charles,” Rose broke in sharply, “pray don’t run on so. I have a great deal to tell you. In the first place, Mamma was very kind. She has forgiven me entirely, and you also.”

“I am glad of that,” Charles said with sincerity.

“And she wants to help us.”

“Help us?” Charles frowned. “But there’s no need for that, Rose, truly. No need, that is, if you can be patient just for a while and put up with things as they are. I know it’s very irksome for you, dearest, but I beg you to try. And if——this is a little hard to say, but I feel that I ought to say it——if your mother should wish to help you a little, just so that you can still have such pretty dresses——why then you had better agree. I can’t bear you to do without all the fine things you care for. But it will only be a little while, remember. I shall soon be able to buy all that you want myself.”

“Charles! Will you not let me get in a word edgewise? It’s not merely the question of some trifling pin-money. Mamma has fine schemes for you.”

“Schemes for *me*?” Charles repeated.

“Yes, love, for you. A junior partnership perhaps. You know what highly connected people now go into business. And Mamma has so many influential friends that——”

Charles interrupted. “Pray stop a moment for I can’t follow you at all. Business? A junior partnership. What should I want with those? And why should your mother find any occupation for me? I have a profession already.”

“But that, my dear,” Rose pointed out, “is just a joke.”

“A joke?”

“Of course. Oh, Charles, pray don’t be foolish. Or stubborn either. You are a gentleman, born and bred. You cannot think surely of remaining on the stage.”

“But Rose——”

“No. Hear me. It was well enough at first just as a kind of frolic. I sympathise altogether with your wish to provoke

your father. He is so strict, so narrow-minded, so absurd. And Mamma sympathises too. She actually admitted to-day that she has liked you better ever since you rebelled. But that's all over now."

"Then what exactly is your mother's proposal?" Charles asked with a dangerous calm.

"That we should leave this dingy place at once. To-morrow. And go to live at Hertford Street while she looks round for you. Now don't frown so, you independent creature. Mamma will find you a handsome berth in no time. Then we can have our own home. And a very fine one, too, for she means in any case to make me an allowance."

"If you return to your mother's house to-morrow, Rose, you go alone."

"Why, Charles, what do you mean?"

"I mean, dear, that you have greatly misunderstood me. The stage is no frolic. It is my work. My life. I love it and I mean to succeed. Your mother may find me a hundred junior partnerships if she pleases. But I'll not take them."

"How can you be so selfish? What of me? Do you want to imprison me in this hovel?"

"You came to me of your own free will, Rose. You begged that we might be married. What did you expect?"

Charles spoke so sternly that Rose coloured. She was reminded by his words of some others which he had spoken—when she had attempted to explain away her meeting with him on the lawn at Longdale. She knew that he could read her motives with no small clarity. And she could not with any great honesty answer his question. For what had she expected? Once her first fury with Harry, her first shock at her mother's cynicism had worn off, very much what had happened. On waking on the morning after her flight in the soft, comfortable bed provided by Mrs. Mathews, Rose, rested in body, peaceful and safe, had considered her situation. Her mother would not be angry for long; she was no John Baron, relentless to the end. The fright of losing her daughter, the

joy of finding her again, would smooth away whatever indignation had at first existed. And then Rose, calculating, calmly, saw matters move her way. She had won Charles for her husband; and, by a little pressure on her mother, could have him on her own terms. Once her daughter was married, once there was no going back, Mrs. Clifford would work untiringly to repair the damage, to make a mis-alliance appear a prosperous match. Rose, interested herself in little beyond dress, entertainment and fashionable society, could conceive of no one, no young person at least, taking a profession seriously. And one could hardly call the disreputable, hand-to-mouth pursuit of acting a profession at all. Her interview with Kitty had provided yet another reason for hurrying Charles into a marriage; and although at the time of her flight her distress, fear and disgust had been genuine enough, Rose, since then, had acted with some cleverness. One sincere emotion alone remained. Her passion for Charles, increased by its gratification, remained as strong and at moments as undisciplined as any wanton's. But Rose could scheme even when she loved, and at the conclusion of her talk with Mrs. Clifford had felt satisfied of having obtained her lover and legalised her pleasures, without the cost of foregoing her former way of life.

She had no doubts at all of Charles's compliance, less even than her mother, who at least had said, "You may find him obstinate, Rose. The stage is, or so I am told, a most fascinating profession to those who like it. Charles's heart may be more deeply lost to the theatre than you suppose."

"Charles's heart is all mine," Rose had replied, while to herself she added—"to do as I please with."

"Very well, my love," said Mrs. Clifford. "You know your husband best. Or I hope that you do, considering what trouble you have caused us all to get him. There then is my offer to the young man. Let him bring you home to-morrow, child. And I will look after the pair of you until he is suitably placed."

"How good you are, Mamma," Rose had said blithely, not foreseeing more than a moment's difficulty in accomplishing her design.

But now Charles, obstinate indeed, confronted her and asked, "What did you expect?"

"I expected——" she faltered. "Oh, never mind that now. Although I certainly did *not* expect that you—given the chance of something better—would ask me to live in these vile lodgings, to fret away every evening alone, to be separated from Mamma and from my friends."

"But I do not wish to separate you from any one. You must have visitors here whenever you choose."

"Visitors!" scoffed Rose. "Mamma might come here from very pity perhaps, but do you think I would ask any friend of mine to cross the threshold of such a pigstye?"

"Oh, Rose, you exaggerate. These lodgings are not by any means a pigstye. Which reminds me that Madame Vestris may call on you to-morrow."

"Madame Vestris indeed! Then hers is the kind of company you wish your wife to keep?"

"Rose," said Charles sharply, "not only has Madame done you a great kindness, but she is, as I told you before, a woman of distinction."

"In her own profession perhaps," retorted Rose, "or *professions* rather. For they say she has been as much a harlot as an actress."

"How dare you? To speak so coarsely of another woman. And one who has befriended you."

"Oh, well," Rose seemed ashamed, "I must beg your pardon, I suppose, for saying that. But you agree with me surely, that to live here would be impossible?"

"Dearest," Charles said kindly, eager to acknowledge her apology, "we shall not live here always. I had meant to look about and find a little house. And then——"

"And then, what?" Rose demanded with such hostility in her voice that he wavered before going on as cheerfully as

possible, "And then you will have plenty of occupation. You will not be dull then. You will——"

"Cook and scrub, I suppose?" put in Rose hotly. "Well you can set your mind at rest on that point, Charles. For I don't intend to keep house for you in a cottage, and spoil my hands and my looks with drudgery. There is no need for it."

"It is the only life I can afford to give you. But there will be no question of drudgery. We will have a servant."

"Some scrubby, untidy girl, I suppose, like the creature employed here. How dare you suggest such horrors to me when Mamma is only too anxious to make us comfortable."

Angrily, Charles rose from the table, pushing back his chair. "I have said my last word on that subject, Rose," he told her. "I shall take nothing from your mother, and I shall not give up the stage."

"Then I shall leave you." She flung the words at him, her lips trembling.

"As you please." Charles spoke so coldly that Rose was frightened; was he really as indifferent as he appeared to be whether she went or stayed?

"I shall leave you to-morrow. I shall return to my own home as early as possible," she said, but her threat held very little conviction.

Charles made no reply, and Rose, bursting into tears, ran from the room, pausing on the threshold to say to him, "I am going to pack. And I shall be gone from here immediately it is light."

She slammed the door behind her. Charles sat down to think; suddenly clear-headed, he saw Rose and her selfishness plainly; saw that, in all probability, she had never meant to live with him on his own humble terms; that she had always at the back of her mind intended to appeal to the mother she had abused so roundly. Charles leant his head on his hand. He felt a bitter disgust at having been so deceived; a fierce wish that he had treated Rose with less consideration. He had

married her against all the promptings of common sense, married her at the very moment of discovering his love for another woman. And she, once sure of him, was set already on altering his life, spoiling his ambition, putting him under hateful obligations to her mother.

"By God," he muttered, "I'll let her go. I'll not endure it."

He savoured instantly the delights of freedom; of being once again his own master; of not being obliged to pinch and scrape so that an idle wife might live in comfort; of being free to love Kitty.

Still angry, still desirous almost that Rose should leave him, he followed her to the bedroom hoping to find her packing. But she was not. She lay upon the bed, her face buried in the pillows, sobbing most piteously.

Charles tried to view this spectacle with coolness, tried to harden his heart. But he made a poor business of it. Rose was his wife, his first love; for whatever reason they had married, he could not, would not, admit defeat so soon. He must try, and she must try, too, to make a success of their marriage.

Rose heard him enter with relief; regretting already what she had said, she was terrified that Charles might take her at her word and expect her to leave him. She raised her head, smiling uncertainly at him through her tears.

"So you are not packing?" Charles asked gravely.

"Oh, Charles, I cannot go. You don't wish me to go, do you? Oh, say that you do not."

"No, Rose. Only—my dear, you must try to make something of this life. You must understand that I——"

"Oh, why do you talk? There is no need for it. Except that you should try and understand me also. This life——"

She paused. Merely to look at Charles revived the sweet intensity of her desire. She held her hand out, saying brokenly, "Charles, Charles, come to me."

Slowly he obeyed. As he bent over his wife she flung both arms around his neck, whispering as she rejoiced to feel his nearness, "I'd rather live in misery with you than in a palace. Oh, say that you love me, my darling. Say it, say it."

"Yes, Rose," he answered quietly. "I—I do love you."

She drew him down to her and covered his face with kisses.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Man and Wife

CHARLES's tenderness to Rose, which followed so swiftly upon their dispute, proved to be the main factor in her determination, so astonishing to Mrs. Clifford, to remain with her husband upon his own terms—odious and unnecessary though she honestly thought them to be. Less than ever now could Rose bring herself to forgo the exquisite pleasure of living intimately with Charles, and, under the spell of this infatuation, she flabbergasted her mother by a spirited defence of his independence.

Mary Clifford, the wind quite taken from her sails, was at first not only amazed but despairing; for she saw herself obliged to admit publicly that her daughter, beyond all hope of salvation, had ruined her chances. But after the third or fourth discussion with Rose upon the subject she took courage. A certain shrewdness where affairs of the heart were concerned came to her aid, strengthening her conviction that Rose was merely bewitched by love's young dream, the inevitable awakening from which would bring about either a complete rupture of the marriage or Charles's unqualified surrender to his wife's wishes. Once sure in her own mind of this eventuality Mrs. Clifford grew more cheerful; she was not only tolerably positive of the trend of future events, but had provided herself with a story to tell the world or that very small portion of it with which she was concerned. The picture she proposed to draw was one of two young creatures, madly in love, stubbornly anxious to work out their own destiny and resolved from pride rather than necessity upon living a life of poverty. Charles's profession, it was true, took some further explaining away, but Mrs. Clifford, by enlarging on the young man's

good birth and breeding, and upon the senseless tyranny of John Baron which had driven his son to folly, hoped to romanticise even so embarrassing a connection as a son-in-law upon the stage. She was determined, verbally at least, to transform a disastrous error into a very touching love story, and to bide her time until Rose tired of her husband or Charles grew weary of playing at theatricals. With this end in view, and with some cunning, she confined her patronage of the young couple to occasional visits and a few presents to her daughter, and never lost an opportunity of describing the innumerable social gaieties from which Rose was now debarred.

Priscilla Ellesmere, guessing with what selfish pertinacity her sister would attempt to disturb if not to wreck the marriage, lost no time in paying Rose a visit. In spite of her gentle but rigid disapproval of the stage as a profession for Charles Baron, Priscilla had been glad to hear that Rose had married him; preferring always to think good rather than evil, she felt most agreeably disappointed in her niece, and rejoiced that Rose had thrown away a match of convenience in order to live precariously with her first love. Her heart warmed to the young people. She had a feminine partiality for giving domestic advice and, being just then in London on a visit to Daniel, she set out alone one morning to make a call in Henrietta Street.

What she found there was more than a little damping to Priscilla's new-born admiration for Rose. Charles had gone out to a rehearsal and his wife, still only half-dressed, a loose robe covering her petticoats, was lolling before a hot fire, having provided herself with some macaroons to nibble and a novel to skip. She was surrounded by a deplorable state of disorder, made the more obvious by various bedraggled evidences of luxury, which showed up, without improving, the dusty and threadbare appearance of the parlour. A bouquet of hothouse flowers had wilted in one of the vases, a silk dress, obtained on credit, and which Rose had been trying on, lay,

crumpled already, upon the sofa. A handsome flagon of scent had been knocked over and broken. Rose had not troubled herself either to collect the fragments of glass or to mop up the pool of violet perfume, the fumes of which filled the airless apartment with an almost suffocating sweetness. A soiled shirt belonging to Charles adorned the table, while Rose's fancy work and several novels were strewn about the floor.

Priscilla, fastidiously neat herself, was much dismayed. She saw that Rose, although voluntarily married to a poor man, was as yet very far from adapting herself to his circumstances, and she discerned regretfully the utter helplessness of this particular young lady of fashion when bereft of the services of her maid.

She greeted her niece affectionately, nevertheless, and having begged that the window might be opened, sat down to talk to Rose as cheerfully as she knew how; but, after some brief and stilted conversation, Priscilla's housewifely instincts triumphed and she inquired whether the young couple intended to remain in lodgings indefinitely.

"I suppose so," Rose replied somewhat sulkily. "This is a shocking place, as you see, but what can we do? Charles has found a cottage in the Brompton Road and raves of it, but to move there would be even more disagreeable."

"More disagreeable? Why, Rose, what can thee mean? Charles's plan seems a very good one. How large is this cottage? Is it pretty?"

"I've no idea. I haven't seen it."

"Thee hasn't—but, my dear child, why not?"

"It is so far to go. We have no carriage. And besides, aunt, I take no interest in the cottage."

Priscilla was almost angry. "Then thee should take an interest," she said crisply. "Does thee not want to make a pleasant home for thy husband?"

"I like to make things pleasant for Charles, of course," Rose retorted with a pout, "but I don't want a house, or even

a cottage, to plague me. We can afford so little comfort. Imagine, aunt, Charles says I must manage with one servant only."

"My dear," asked Priscilla, "how does thee employ thyself now when Charles is out?"

"That's just what I dislike so. I have nothing to do whatever. No carriage, as I just said; no money for amusements. And I certainly couldn't entertain my friends in such a shabby place as this."

"All the more reason then for taking this cottage. Thee would not be so dull, my dear, if thee had housekeeping to distract thee."

"Really, aunt! You know I have no gift for that sort of thing at all. I should detest it. We do at least have service here, of a kind. But did you ever see such a horrible place in your life?"

"I have seen many worse, child," Priscilla answered a little sternly. "It is not a pretty room, I grant thee. But need it be so untidy? So dusty?"

"Oh, as to the dust," was Rose's airy answer, "that man of Charles's offered to put the room to rights. He comes here every morning because the landlady only keeps one wretched slut of a servant. But I wouldn't admit him to-day. How can I read in peace while the clumsy creature flaps round me with a duster?"

"Rose!" exclaimed Priscilla, "I am surprised at thee. To refuse to admit a manservant while thee are in such an undressed state, I agree with. But why be so? Why sit here so idly without even troubling to dress thyself? I would not let myself be seen so by my own kitchenmaid."

"No, aunt, I dare say you would not. But we cannot all be the same. And there is really no purpose in my dressing until Charles comes in. I shall be neat enough by dinner-time." And Rose yawned widely, wishing that her aunt would cease lecturing and go away.

Priscilla sighed. She had not come there to find fault with

her niece, but rather to praise her for preferring love and comparative poverty to the heartless alliance engineered by her mother. She had come to Henrietta Street full of affection and primed with the gentle advice she loved to give. Rose's defiant indolence had betrayed her into sharpness and spoil the pleasure of her visit, and Mrs. Ellesmere soon took her leave, her heart filled with an anxious commiseration for Charles, while Rose, heartily glad to see the back of her caller, returned to her book and her macaroons. By the time that Charles returned, however, she had put on her new gown, arranged herself perfectly down to every elegant detail, and presented so lovely a picture to her husband's eyes that the neglected state of the parlour escaped them.

But as the days and weeks of their married life slipped by, Rose, even with her personal appearance, took less and less trouble; only Charles, she argued, saw her, and since he knew very well how exquisite she could look, there was very small need to keep on reminding him of it. So she continued, whenever so inclined, to sit about in a dressing-robe, even to dine in it, to impede Thomas's efforts to straighten the parlour and to idle the time away with the sweetmeats and romances which she seldom troubled to finish. She amused herself one morning by obtaining money from Charles with which to buy a puppy, and for a few hours was entirely absorbed in caressing and admiring her pet, whom she pronounced the sweetest little creature in the world and decorated, to the animal's extreme indignation, with a bow of pink satin ribbon. But when Dandy had eaten a pair of pretty new slippers, had whined for the dinner Rose forgot to give him, and when she discovered that dogs require regular exercise, she began to dislike him. The once pampered favourite became an intolerable nuisance. In spite of Thomas, who loved him and exercised him whenever possible, Dandy had a poor time of it, until Charles, hurt by his wife's almost cruel impatience with her pet and by the dirty conditions that prevailed owing to her neglect of the poor little creature's needs,

insisted that the puppy be given to Thomas. The good fellow carried Dandy away, promising to find a good home for him, and Rose, after some pretence of missing her dog, began to talk of purchasing a guitar.

Charles, occupied and interested at the theatre, endured his so-called home life without too much distress, although this unsuspected slatternliness in Rose both vexed and surprised him. There was, in his wife's disorderly ways, no touch of that warmth of feeling, that ability to produce essential comforts which had so redeemed the casual domestic habits of Kitty. At Frith Street, no matter how untidy the rooms might be, good food was never lacking, Charles's mending and washing had been promptly done, the fires burned brightly, while Kitty herself, if often raffish in her dress, had a fresh, smiling look as desirable and far more rare than scrupulous neatness. But Rose's negligence, which was not, as in Kitty's case, the outcome of a carefree nature, but of mere indolent selfishness, defeated the cause of comfort. She had so little notion of living without the assistance of a large staff of servants that even the simplest domestic duty seemed beyond her; although the fire by which she spent so much time was lighted each morning, she would as likely as not go out shopping or take the whim to spend an hour or so in her bedroom intent upon her toilet, without even thinking to put more coal on. On discovering the fire to be out, she would summon the overworked maidservant to relight it, and, as the girl's time was more than fully occupied, Charles often returned from rehearsing or from the performance at night to find his wife shivering and to shiver with her.

The meals provided by Mrs. Hardwick, though solid enough, were never embellished by any such delicacies as Rose might so easily have bought or ordered; her own appetite, impaired by constant nibbling at sweetmeats, was so languid that she would merely turn with disgust from the plain food on the table, without making any effort to improve it. Now and again, certainly, some slight relish, a

patty or some potted fish, did make its appearance, but for these indulgences Charles was indebted to Thomas.

If Rose tore her stockings or her clothes, she would either pay the servant-girl extravagantly for mending them, or, more frequently, would give her the garments themselves and purchase new ones at Howell and James or at some other fashionable shop which she had patronised as Miss Clifford. Her mother, guessing by the numerous additions to her wardrobe, how deeply Rose must be running into debt, smiled complacently, seeing that in the final reckoning up of this prodigality her hand would be very much strengthened.

With regard to his own clothes Charles fared better; such of these as were soiled or in need of mending were extracted by Thomas, who took them home with him and returned them very shortly in a good state of repair, mended, so he said, by Sally, to whom he was now married.

"But it's 'orrible," he remarked to his wife, not for the first time, "'orrible to see 'ow Master Charles is put on, by that little——"

"Now, Thomas," said Sally in affectionate reproof, "don't use no words. Words is wicked. After all," she added sentimentally, her mind not unnaturally being still full of the joys of romance, "after all, Thomas, she did marry him for love and give up a rich husband and all to do it."

"Then what I says is," retorted Thomas, "it's a pity that she did. 'Owever much she may 'ave fancied Master Charles in the first place, she don't treat 'im right now. She don't lift a finger, Sal, to make 'im comfortable or 'appy."

"I don't like her for that, I must say," replied young Mrs. Ford, who was engaged in knitting a sock for her own pampered husband, "but she's used to everything fine, don't forget. Being such a lady." Sally could sympathise with Charles's wrongs and yet still retain her great admiration for the quality.

But Thomas was more single-minded. "Lady indeed," he snorted. "A nice sort of lady what's still in curl papers at

noon. And yet she must spend a rare amount of money on making 'erself fine, for I'm told hoff to go out with 'er two or three days a week, and it's always to shops we goes to. You mark my words, Sal, Master Charles 'as been badly mistook. He should 'ave taken Miss Kitty, what fancied 'im for certain or I'm a Dutchman."

"Miss Kitty's as sweet and kind as can be," Sally said warmly, "but she's a deal older than Mr. Charles and she's not——"

"Not what?" asked her husband severely.

"Well," faltered Sally, anxious not to displease Thomas but still a trifle dazzled by the legend of Rose's grandeur. "She's not what you'd call a lady exactly. Not a regular one, I mean, compared to Miss Clifford that was."

"Ladies is," pronounced Thomas, "as ladies does. And Miss Kitty, to my 'umble way of thinking, is more of such than what the present Mrs. Charles Baron is or never will be. It's 'eart that tells, my girl. 'Eart. And don't you never forget 'ow good Miss Kitty is to us, and to the old gent, too, and that rowdy young spark of a brother. You don't see 'er flying into tempers like Mrs. Baron did this morning."

"What was she in a temper about?"

"Oh, something what that poor 'ard-worked girl at 'Enrietta Street 'ad or 'adn't done. Nothing much as far as I could see, but what a tantrum Mrs. B. was in! No, Sally, and I don't mind saying it—you're more a lady than what she is."

"Oh, Thomas," gasped the red-haired girl, much flattered. "What a thing to say! Do you mean it?"

"I'm not in the 'abit," returned her husband with dignity, "of saying what I can't substansyate. You're—well, you know well henough what I think of you, Sal. You're a treat." He began to sing "No, 'twas neither form nor feature," a lyric which Sally did not take personally, being happily aware by now that Thomas considered her a raving beauty.

"As to what you said just now," she remarked when the

ballad was over, "about Miss Kitty having a fancy for Mr. Charles, I believe you're right, Thomas. The poor thing seems quite sad, and how pleased she is to make them little dainties for him. And to mend his clothes too."

"Yes," agreed Thomas gloomily, "'andles them quite reverent she does. And look 'ow she's took to Dandy. Said at first she couldn't 'ave no dog 'ere on account of Lawrence, and then directly I says Dandy come from Master Charles she's ready to keep the hanimal for hever. It's sad, Sal, that's what it is. 'Ow about a cup of tea?"

As Sally jumped up readily to attend to his needs, Thomas, seated at ease before the kitchen fire, rejoiced in his own domestic felicity and deplored his young master's lack of it.

In spite of many peevish apprehensions to the contrary, Rose, for some little time at least, enjoyed more congenial society than she had dared to hope for; sundry fashionable young women of her acquaintance, thrilled by rumours of her clandestine marriage, were eager to see its effect upon their friend, and on meeting Rose on her somewhat rare visits to Hertford Street, professed themselves charmed rather than shocked at her boldness in marrying an actor. In her mother's drawing-room Rose found herself the centre of so much gush, sentimental curiosity and admiration that she was highly gratified, and even ventured to invite some of these romantic young persons to visit her. They accepted with alacrity, called at Henrietta Street expecting to behold there who knows what of glamour, dissipation and eccentricity, but on finding merely a shabby lodging-house and a quietly-behaved husband, still professionally obscure, they fluttered away in disillusionment, returned but seldom and referred to Rose thereafter as that "poor, foolish dear." Much embittered by this treatment, she did at least learn from it one striking lesson—that it was less the nature of man's calling that counted than his success therein or the lack of it. She was made aware that had Charles been an actor of any fame, of any notoriety even, the raptures

of her friends would have continued and she began to wonder whether, since it seemed impossible to deflect her husband from his purpose, it might not be more prudent, through influence, to further it. Why, Rose asked herself, should not her mother, instead of pulling strings to place Charles in business, make some similar efforts to advance him upon the stage? But, on putting this proposition before Mrs. Clifford, she met with very scant encouragement.

"I quite agree with you, child," said that lady, "that a *famous* actor may be regarded as a person of some consequence. I have met such people in perfectly good society and they are often of great assistance in arranging private theatricals. But one does not become famous overnight. Charles has still a long way to go, it is questionable whether he has any real talent, and, in the meantime, it is you, my love, who must suffer."

"No, Mamma, I do not," replied Rose firmly, for she was still afraid that Mrs. Clifford might devise some means by which to separate her involuntarily from Charles. "I am dull, I admit, but that might all be put right if only Charles could do better. If he could earn more money and be more prominently before the public. Such things can be arranged, surely."

"My dear child," said her mother, "that may be so. But I have no influence whatever in theatrical circles. I do not take such persons seriously. Now, if you can but persuade Charles to be reasonable, I might find the very thing for him. And I do wish, my dearest girl, that you would bring him to his senses soon. I have a great many visits to pay this summer and shall be utterly miserable at the thought of leaving you behind."

Rose, taken up just then with her new schemes for Charles, showed less discontent at being excluded from her mother's plans for the summer than Mrs. Clifford had hoped to see; not only was she very much in love, but the notion inspired by her friends of being the wife of a famous actor had become temporarily pleasing to her. No more was said between

mother and daughter on the subject, but Rose, partly to divert herself and partly from a genuine, if selfish, desire to assist her husband, began to take a rather stronger interest in theatrical matters, to maintain a fairly civil show of friendship for Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews, and to behave on her occasional visits to the Green Room with a cordiality which astonished Charles, who, while puzzled by such a change in her, was also pleased by it, and did all that he could to keep his wife's new interest in the theatre alive. He encouraged Rose to attend performances at the Olympic, and at those times when he was not himself included in the bill, took her to see whatever of merit was being performed elsewhere.

One evening in the Green Room he chanced to mention to Charles Mathews his project of going later in the week to Covent Garden, where Macready had recently put on *Richelieu*, a new drama by Edward Bulwer.

"Then you had better pay a visit to Mr. Macready's dressing-room, Barty," said Vestris, who was standing by.

"Now why?" demanded Charles Mathews. "Of what use can that pompous fellow be to Barty? He remains with us, surely?"

"Yes, indeed he does," replied Vestris, "and if our plans for next season mature we must try to bring Barty forward. But that is no reason against his gaining the interest of Macready. Who knows when he may need it?" Vestris sighed, for the losses at the Olympic that season had been heavy, and in spite of several conspicuous successes, she had failed to repair the damage done by her absence in America. She hoped to recuperate by taking Covent Garden Theatre in the autumn, but the project was still in abeyance, and as she and her husband, both in personal matters and those appertaining to the theatre, were extravagant, the situation was at present a difficult one.

"You are unjust to Macready, *mon vieux*," put in d'Orsay, who was in the Green Room. "He is a good fellow in many ways. I like him."

"And I," retorted Mathews, "do not. He has more than once spoken disparagingly of my dear father. And although I grant him a fine gift for tragedy, his system with the rest of the cast is ridiculous."

"What system is that?" Charles asked.

"Our esteemed friend at Covent Garden surrounds himself with indifferent players and insists that they—the men at least—model their performances, in whatever part, upon his own. He demands in fact a pallid imitation, with the result that one sees on the stage not one but a dozen Macreadys, all of them inferior to the original. Which is exactly what my gentleman intends."

"Well, my love," said Vestris, "I am with you up to a point. And there is certainly little love lost between Macready and myself. I am positive that he thinks me vulgar."

"He is jealous of your success in management, my dear Eliza. He has made a very poor business of it himself this season."

"I can sympathise with him for that," Vestris remarked gravely. "And in such a precarious life as ours it can do no harm to bring Barty to his notice. There is little fear, I am sure, of our Quaker's deserting old friends while they still need him."

"No indeed," Charles cried indignantly. "I care nothing for Mr. Macready. I have no wish to meet him even. But I want to take Rose to the play, and *Richelieu* has been well-spoken of."

"Go by all means," said d'Orsay. "And go also to visit Macready. I will write a note for you, *hein?*"

"That will do very well," Mathews agreed, "and be a far pleasanter introduction to Macready than mine or Eliza's. Forget what I said, Barty, for the fellow is not so bad. But such a stick! Such a moralist!"

"Yet they say," observed Vestris, "that Miss Faucit is for ever closeted in his dressing-room. That, my friends, is the

latest *potin* from Covent Garden! I had it but yesterday from Mrs. Warner."

"No, no," protested d'Orsay laughing, "*ce n'est pas vrai*. You may depend upon it that Miss Faucit's visits are connected with business only. *Ce bon* Macready loves to expound the art of acting, as we know. *Du reste*—his wife is still a pretty woman, and he a model husband."

"One would almost think better of him if he were not," put in the incorrigible Mathews. "Helen Faucit is a handsome girl and frailty at least is human."

"For shame, Charles!" exclaimed Vestris.

And the conversation ended with d'Orsay writing the promised letter of introduction and giving this to Charles.

Rose was delighted by the prospect of a visit to Covent Garden; having listened somewhat more carefully of late to theatrical conversations, she had learned that Macready, although by no means popular with his fellow actors, was esteemed by the outside world a gentleman, was entertained by many distinguished people and was at the top of his profession. He was therefore, she decided, the very man to help Charles, and she herself was by no means reluctant to becoming on friendly terms with an actor who was received by Lord This and by Lady That. She looked forward to the evening with much pleasure and, while a little apprehensive that Bulwer's play might be dull, she supposed, on hearing that the Queen had attended Covent Garden a few nights previously, that it was also *à la mode*. She dressed herself with such care, in a new gown of leaf-green taffeta, that Charles was dazzled afresh by his wife's beauty, and if he wondered a little at seeing yet another new dress, supposed this like the others to be a gift from Mrs. Clifford; for Rose, without actually committing herself, had led her husband to believe that these frequent purchases of hers were made on her mother's credit.

Rose found *Richelieu* almost as dry as she had feared, but Charles was greatly impressed by the play, even more so by Macready's acting in the name part, although he agreed up

to a point with Mathews's strictures; several members of the company appeared to have modelled their performances upon that of the star without having perceptibly improved them. But the part of Richelieu being a long one, the real Macready held the stage, looking magnificent in his scarlet robes and contriving in all the serious passages to be most majestically compelling. Bulwer, however, had provided the Cardinal with a certain number of humorous lines, and to these, in Charles's opinion, Macready brought small conviction; he seemed to resent such a decline into frivolity and to be, as it were, straining back to the heights of rhetoric and passion. But with this one reservation his performance was a superb one.

"I suppose," Charles said to Rose during an interval, "that to be great—as truly great as Garrick—one must understand both tragedy *and* comedy and be able to swing easily from one to the other."

"I suppose so," she replied without much interest, her attention being engaged in studying the fashions displayed in the opposite boxes.

"And yet," Charles continued, warming to his subject, "they say that Mrs. Siddons even in private life could not cease to be tragic." And he repeated to his wife the story of this great actress's words to a forgetful waiter—"You brought me porter, boy, I asked for beer," a rebuke delivered with all the majesty of a Shakespearian fragment.

Rose smiled abstractedly. "Mr. Macready is certainly handsome," she remarked. "Do you think Helen Faucit pretty?"

"Well enough. She is good in the lighter parts of the play, but she seems unable to express emotion except by whining."

"Her dresses are hideous," said Rose.

Richelieu over, and since Macready did not appear in the farce which formed the after-piece, Charles and Rose left their places and went round to the back of the theatre. D'Orsay's note was handed to the stage doorkeeper, and after a brief

wait they were invited to proceed to Mr. Macready's room, where they found the tragedian, who had replaced the cardinal's scarlet splendour with a most decorous dressing-gown, in conversation with several gentlemen. Macready, a handsome, dark-eyed man of good figure and somewhat sombre aspect, greeted both Charles and his wife politely, presented them to his friends, Mr. Forster, Mr. Brydone, Mr. Serle and Mr. Robertson, and, after apologising to Rose for his attire, begged her to be seated.

"Count d'Orsay mentions that you are at the Olympic," he then said civilly, addressing Charles.

"Yes, sir. And may I say——" Charles was about to express his admiration of his host's talents, when Rose, elated to find herself surrounded by men and anxious to achieve her purpose, interrupted him.

Without waiting to offer any congratulation to Mr. Macready, she reverted to his question and said, "Oh, yes, my husband is at the Olympic. But we hope he will not remain there for long. I am sure *you* will agree that it is not at all the right place for him. He should be playing in Shakespeare."

Charles blushed hotly. Whatever pleasure he might have felt in Rose's unusual show of interest in his concerns was lost in mortification at her inaccurate officiousness. To express public dissatisfaction with the Olympic, the theatre which he loved and which had given him his chance, and by her use of the third person to associate him with such dissatisfaction, was deplorable; to obtrude herself and her husband's affairs upon an eminent actor, notoriously the most touchy man in the profession, without even the courtesy of mentioning his own performance, was both ill-judged and ill-bred.

Macready did momentarily appear vexed. He had a great aversion from seeing any woman, however beautiful or young, put herself forward—particularly in matters relating to the stage. Macready, who had been taken from a promising career at Rugby to manage the theatrical company of his bankrupt father, still abhorred in many ways his profession.

His wife came seldom to the theatre, his children never, and his intimacies were formed among those who pursued different and, to his mind, more respectable callings. Before making a cold reply to Rose, however, he happened to glance at Charles's face and permitted the distress and embarrassment which he saw expressed there to soften him. A consistent admirer of good sense and good manners, Macready guessed Charles to be a nice, earnest young fellow handicapped by marriage with a pretty fool; and instead of speaking with the stiffness he had intended, he merely remarked to Rose, "That, madam, is a matter of opinion. Your husband is young and has the wisdom, I suspect, to learn his art thoroughly. The Olympic is a most successful theatre and no doubt Shakespeare will come all in good time."

Rose, only slightly abashed, would have spoken again, but Charles, filled with gratitude for Macready's kindness, burst into a eulogy of his Richelieu, which was received by the actor, as his due perhaps, but with a very marked graciousness. He was not on the whole partial to young men, particularly young actors, but there was much about Charles to please him; the boy showed zeal and discernment without any trace of self-conceit; he also showed good breeding, and this, in the eyes of a man who suffered daily from the coarseness of his professional associates, was a very great asset. So well satisfied indeed was Mr. Macready with his visitor, that he embarked upon a lengthy, but by no means unhelpful, dissertation upon the art of acting, which was attended to both by Charles and by the other gentlemen, who, although undoubtedly familiar with such talk, seemed to express by listening to it their sympathy and goodwill towards the young actor for whose benefit it was repeated.

Rose, much chagrined that neither her dress nor her beauty had succeeded in subjugating the company, sat by sulkily, quite resolved now that not all Mr. Macready's fame could make him otherwise than prosy, churlish and blankly unsusceptible to the charms of a pretty and well-connected young

woman; and so great was her disapprobation of the man whom she had intended to court that she even began to compare his manners unfavourably with those of Charles Mathews. Nor was Rose better pleased when Charles, after thanking Macready for his kindness, hurried her away without leaving any time at all for her to make upon the other gentlemen the impression she still hoped to achieve.

She maintained a resentful silence until they reached home, where, almost before Charles had closed the parlour door, she vented upon her husband the full force of her vexation, accusing him by his own glaring incivility to her of encouraging Mr. Macready and his guests to be uncivil also.

"It is not to be wondered at," she cried angrily, "that they chose to behave as though I were invisible. Did you once refer to me or give any sign that I was a person to be respected or considered?"

"There was no need to," Charles replied curtly, for he was angry too. "You seemed capable enough of bringing yourself forward and you did it, let me tell you, in a most improper manner."

"Improper indeed! Where is the impropriety in speaking of my own husband as I did? I was merely trying to interest Mr. Macready in your future."

"My dear girl, had I wanted his patronage there are surely more suitable people to obtain it for me."

"More suitable than your wife! And that from you, Charles, who are always complaining that I take no interest in your career. That I——"

Here Rose broke off to whimper, and Charles, aware that she had perhaps some justice on her side, felt contrite, although still indignant.

"You meant well, I dare say," he admitted grudgingly, "but you should not drag our personal affairs into a public conversation. Of what possible interest can they be to Mr. Macready? And besides, how could you have spoken so slightly of the Olympic? Can't you understand that what you

said was a reflection upon Madame Vestris, to whom I owe so much? And you even implied that I agreed with you!"

"If you do not agree with me, you should," Rose retorted. "The Olympic may be fashionable enough in its way, but surely such theatres as Covent Garden and Drury Lane have more dignity, more gentility and pay better salaries besides."

"Oh, do pray drop the subject. It is not so long ago that you asked me whether one theatre were not very much like another. Where you've found these new notions, I neither know nor care. But if you must talk such nonsense, save it for me. And don't air your opinions in public, for they only make you ridiculous."

"Oh, so you thought me ridiculous? And yet, when we left here for the theatre you pretended to admire me. Was I not looking my best, was I not well dressed? And am I not more of a gentlewoman than this wonderful Macready of yours is in the habit of receiving?"

"No doubt you are all those things, but what do they matter? I am not discussing your appearance or your position in life. I am asking you not to embarrass me by making silly, tactless speeches."

Rose began to weep in good earnest. "How ungrateful you are!" she sobbed. "How cruel! Cannot you understand that I want to help you. Need you be so contemptuous of my poor little efforts?"

Charles, who still believed himself the injured party, felt some exasperation at having the tables turned on him; Rose's new interest in his career was bewildering rather than pleasant; he would have preferred her not to meddle at all either to further his progress or to impede it, for to him her encouragement seemed as irrational as her antagonism. But he had no wish to see her unhappy, nor to appear unkind or ungrateful himself.

"Let us say no more about it," he suggested wearily. "You meant well, I am sure. And you did no real harm either, for Mr. Macready was most courteous and kind."

"Mr. Macready! Mr. Macready! Mr. Macready! Is he all that you care for? What of me? What of my disappointment in having all the good I tried to do you thrown back in my face? What of my feelings? You might have a little consideration for me, I think. More particularly *now*."

"What do you mean, Rose? Why now especially? Aren't you well?"

"No!" she exclaimed hysterically. "I am not. Could you expect me to be, when—oh, dear God, what a predicament!"

"Predicament? What is the matter? Tell me, Rose, quickly."

"So you are stupid as well as cruel. Can't you guess what I have to tell you?"

"No," replied Charles bluntly. "I cannot."

"It's a disaster," wailed Rose, "as if we were not poor and wretched enough already. You will have to take steps now, Charles, either to earn more money at this foolish acting of yours, or else to give it up altogether. For even if you are selfish enough to inflict such a life on me, your wife, you must surely take better care of your child."

"Rose! Is it—are you—have you told me the truth?"

"I have, indeed! Why should you doubt it? I have known for some weeks now."

"But why," Charles demanded, "did you not tell me sooner?"

"I was too distressed. It is not an easy matter to speak of. Oh, Charles, Charles, be good to me now!"

Rose flung herself into her husband's arms and he, much moved, began to soothe her as tenderly as he knew how; he was bewildered by her announcement, very much alarmed and quite as conscious of the pain and anxiety which lay before his wife as she had hoped to find him. The evening ended in the greatest felicity for Rose, for she was carried most lovingly to bed, where she soon fell into a deep and tranquil sleep, but where Charles lay awake for many hours wondering by what possible means he could contend with this new responsibility.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Covent Garden

At the end of May the Olympic Theatre closed and Madame Vestris said good-bye for ever to the little playhouse whose fortunes she had revived so brilliantly; the period covering her absence in America had been the only unsuccessful season which the Olympic, under her management, had known; and it was unfortunate, that in spite of the increased takings since her return, a heavy accumulation of debt remained. But, since this was the case, her hopes and those of her husband were now all set upon Covent Garden, which being a much larger house than the Olympic was confidently expected to yield a return substantial enough to put their affairs in order. The theatre had been leased to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews on advantageous terms by Charles Kemble, and the whole Olympic company was to reassemble there in the autumn.

Charles Baron had both hoped and expected to return for the summer months to the York circuit where, being a favourite with the Wilkinson brothers, he was sure of a warm welcome. But in making this plan he had reckoned without Rose; she rebelled flatly against spending the summer in Yorkshire and, by laying the strongest possible stress on her state of health, persuaded Charles to take her to Weymouth for the months of June, July and August.

To give his wife this change of air, and to share it with her, required the expenditure of all Charles's savings—all the money in fact which he had hoped one day to return to Margaret. He suffered a good deal of distress at taking advantage of this reserve, and would have suffered even more had he known how profoundly his step-sister disapproved of his marriage to Rose. That he was ignorant of the full extent of Margaret's anger

was due to Daniel, who had represented her as being merely surprised and grieved, and who continued not only to pay Charles the twenty guineas each month, but to deliver to him such briefly affectionate messages as Margaret had been in the habit of sending. To have told a falsehood in business or on his own behalf would have been impossible to Daniel Ellesmere, but for the sake of Charles—or for the sake of Margaret, rather—such prevarications came easily to him and inflicted no pain at all upon his conscience. Daniel, as Charles now fully knew, was a most loyal and valuable friend, and although as dissatisfied as was his mother with Rose's attitude to married life, he treated his pretty cousin with such great kindness that he, alone of all the relatives, had been admitted into the secret of her expected child.

Rose, with the steady resolution of which she was capable, when her own interests were at stake, had contrived to hide her condition from her mother. Welcome though maternal petting and commiseration would have been, she feared that the announcement of her pregnancy might lead to active interference, that Mrs. Clifford by insisting on her return home would leave Charles free to go to Yorkshire, to mix with undesirable companions, and even perhaps to become attracted to some other woman. Ever since her humiliating experience in Macready's dressing-room, Rose had reverted to her original contempt for the stage; she was now, therefore, counting on the birth of her child to solve the differences on the subject between herself and Charles, and to prove to him the importance of selecting a more gentlemanly and profitable profession than acting. Because, like most very young husbands, Charles was awed by the dangers of childbirth and extremely apprehensive for his wife's safety, Rose found it easier now to coax him into agreement with her whims, although in her case such anxiety on his part was hardly necessary. She was a healthy young woman in spite of her indolence, and her sufferings were correspondingly light; and she possessed also that supple slimness of figure which, by tending to conceal her condition,

had assisted her up till the time of departure for Weymouth in deceiving Mrs. Clifford.

Charles made the journey most unwillingly; apart from the expense of maintaining himself and Rose at the seaside and, at her express request, keeping on the despised rooms in London, he could look forward to three months of enforced idleness with so little composure that Rose, who had anticipated much pleasure from the society of an unoccupied and, therefore, attentive husband, found him both discontented and morose. He fretted after his work; he was anxious about money; he discovered the unrelieved company of his wife to be irksome; and he began to think almost constantly of Kitty. The weather that summer was exceedingly fine. The walks in the locality were numerous. But Rose would not walk; she preferred to seek out such amusements as Weymouth afforded and to mix with those persons whom she found fashionable enough to accept as seaside acquaintances. She had brought with her a very extensive summer wardrobe and contrived, even at such a time, to look very elegant whenever she went out; indoors, however, Rose, believing her attraction for her husband to be secure, took very little trouble to charm him. She was beginning to feel genuinely languid and unwell, and in virtue of this, she allowed her idleness and inability to wait upon herself to increase. Because she was aware that no woman among their casual acquaintance at Weymouth interested Charles, and having for the time at least forgotten Kitty O'Brien's existence, Rose, while conscious that her husband seemed less of a lover than formerly, attributed this change to his deference for her condition and not to any lessening of desirability in herself.

But she was sadly mistaken, for it was during this unlucky holiday that Charles fell out of love with her. He now lived with his wife in such unrestricted companionship that every fault she had became most glaringly obvious to him; her selfishness in small matters and the vanity that demanded an admiration unearned by personal neatness or obliging manners

began to disgust him; and this disgust, mixed as it was with pity, and with self-blame for having caused her pregnancy, had so painful an effect upon Charles's spirits that the three months spent at Weymouth were a veritable misery to him.

He and Rose bickered continually, until one day a major quarrel arose between them caused by her discovery among some papers of the horoscope cast for Charles by Arletti.

From the very first glance this document displeased Rose, giving as it did such very hopeful predictions regarding Charles's success on the stage, and, on reading further, she came to a prophecy of Arletti's which threw her into a very passion of jealousy and fear. "You are likely," the old man had written, "to make an early and unlucky marriage. This in all probability will not last, and there is a strong chance of your finding happiness through a different and far worthier attachment."

Charles, returning later from a walk, found Rose in a highly hysterical condition.

"How did you come by such wickedness?" she demanded, flinging the horoscope on the table before him.

Charles picked it up. "Oh, that," he replied, laughing. "I thought I had thrown it away long ago. It is the merest nonsense."

"I can see that for myself," retorted Rose, but with no great certainty, for she was inclined to be superstitious. "But it is disgraceful just the same. To say such things of our marriage! These charlatans should be put down by law."

Charles, who had stubbornly refused to take either Arletti or his predictions seriously, now read the paper through again. He began his perusal with a disdainful smile, but on reaching the passage which had so incensed Rose, his smile faded and he felt for one moment wildly and unreasonably elated; then, as if ashamed of himself, he laughed with somewhat unconvincing contempt and tore the horoscope in half.

"I still say it is nonsense," he told Rose. "The old fellow

insisted on casting it for me and would not take no for an answer. But I do not believe in such foolery and I never shall."

"That is all very well," answered Rose. "But there may be *some* kind of meaning in it. A great many people are guided by the stars. What can he mean? And how dare he say that our marriage is unlucky."

"You might as well ask me what those old gipsy women mean who are always pestering one to cross your palm with silver. You seem to take Arletti's rubbish as a personal affront, yet, I was not even married to you at the time."

"If you think the thing such rubbish, why did you preserve it? I found it placed very carefully in that bundle of papers."

"It came there by accident, I assure you."

"I don't think so. I have no doubt you kept it by you as a sort of encouragement. And I have no doubt that the 'worthier' attachment he speaks of exists already. And that in London you were making love to the creature behind my back."

"Rose! How can you be so credulous and so absurd? There is no attachment, I tell you. None." Charles spoke with more vehemence than was wise, for Rose immediately concluded from it that he was lying.

"It is well enough to protest," she said angrily, "and to try to throw dust in my eyes. But you certainly *had* an attachment. You were carrying on an intrigue with that vulgar Irish girl at your lodgings."

"I was not," Charles retorted. "And I must ask you not to speak of her so. She is not vulgar."

"Indeed? I fancy any one would agree with my opinion of her—unless of course their eyes were blinded by love! And it's my belief that whatever was between you once is not yet over. That man of yours, Thomas, probably acts as a go-between."

"That is a lie!" flashed Charles. "Kitty would not——"

Rose interrupted him, her voice shrill with fury. "Kitty, indeed! Why, you cannot even speak her name, Charles, without your voice changing. And do you suppose I have not noticed your coldness to me of late? I see it all now. You

married me because—well, because you are not fool enough, I suppose, to marry out of your class—but you have kept up the intrigue. Oh, don't deny it, pray. For I am right."

"If you believe so," Charles answered coldly, "I will *not* deny it. You evidently enjoy your suspicions, so you may keep them. I would not for the world deprive you of the smallest pleasure." And he walked out of the room.

Rose was on her feet in a moment, running to the door after him and screaming out his name; but Charles did not turn back. He left the house and walked down to the sea-shore.

It was a beautiful afternoon. He walked to and fro upon an unfrequented stretch of sand, trying to compose his thoughts, doing his utmost to suppress the hopefulness which this second and more careful perusal of the horoscope had aroused in him. Could it be true, he asked himself. Was it possible that this unhappy, restraining union with Rose was not to endure? Was it possible even that somewhere, in the not too far future, he might meet Kitty again and gratify the love which he had recognised too late? Only for a few minutes, however, did Charles permit himself to dream thus. It occurred to him suddenly, with a most painful clarity, that his marriage with Rose could only reasonably be ended by death and as he recalled how many women died in childbirth he was filled with a sick horror at his sensations of excitement, hope and joy. To have thought thus even, condemned him as a kind of passive murderer!

Charles literally ran from the beach, returning as quickly as possible to his lodgings to make up the quarrel and to treat Rose with all the tenderness and consideration he could command; and if in his manner there was a lack of ease or sincerity, and some too obvious endeavour, Rose was none the wiser; she was delighted by such a display of penitence, and since she really believed her husband innocent, at any rate, since their marriage, of any relations with Kitty O'Brien, she found the reconciliation with Charles much to her taste. The rest of their stay at Weymouth passed more pleasantly, for,

although Charles inwardly continued restless and unhappy, he managed to conceal his true feelings from Rose and to treat her with very great kindness.

On their return in September to Henrietta Street, where a most formidable array of bills awaited them, Charles learned for the first time that it was her own and not her mother's credit which his wife had so recklessly been pledging. She was so well known to be a rich woman's daughter that the majority of these applications for payment were courteously worded, but a certain milliner, from whom Rose had purchased an astonishing number of hats and bonnets, and who had herself fallen into difficulties, phrased her demand with the most threatening insistence. Charles was most disturbed both by Rose's duplicity and by the large sums of money which appeared to be owing, but his wife took the matter with great coolness.

"My dear Charles," she said loftily, "don't scold so. To worry over a few bills is shockingly middle-class. No one is pressing us, really, except this wretched Celeste, and you may be sure she only writes so urgently because other people are pressing *her*."

Charles, while admitting the probable truth of this theory, could not see that it improved the situation; he felt very sorry for the milliner, reduced through the dilatoriness of Rose and other extravagant women to a state of distress. But it was impossible either to depress Rose's light-heartedness or to pay the money himself. As he was in debt in various other directions—not for large sums, fortunately—and as he had the expenses of his wife's confinement to allow for, he could do nothing except pay his way as best he could, placate creditors, and look forward to the opening of Covent Garden.

Besides the bills, one other item of news had caused Charles much unhappiness, even while he told himself that it should not have concerned him at all. Thomas, who was waiting at Henrietta Street to receive his master, informed him at the first opportunity that Kitty and her father had left for Dublin,

and that there was very little prospect of their returning to London. "

After giving this intelligence to Charles, Thomas remarked gloomily, "It'ud seem as 'ow poor Miss Kitty 'asn't 'ad no luck at all, Master Charles, since—since——" He paused, looking somewhat awkward.

"You mean, I think," said Charles, "that she has been unlucky ever since my leaving Frith Street?"

"Well, sir, that's correct enough in a manner of speaking. But it's not you that's to blame, Master Charles. It's a coincidence, if you take my meaning. Now that brother of 'ers——"

"What of him?" Charles asked curtly.

"The trouble 'e's been, Master Charles! 'E's worse than the old gent by a long way; for, as I've remarked hoften enough to Sally, poor Mr. O'Brien may 'ave 'is weaknesses, but he does treat Miss Kitty right in hother ways, setting aside 'is fondness for the bottle."

"And you mean," Charles demanded sternly, "that Jack, that her brother, does not?"

"Hindeed, no, Master Charles." Thomas spoke warmly. "And Sally would tell you what I do. I've heard that young spark call his sister some shocking names when in liquor. And once——" He paused again.

"Go on."

"Well, sir, once when 'e'd been a-hasking and a-hasking of 'er for money, and Miss Kitty kept a-saying as she 'ad none, he shouted out for all of us to 'ear——' Well, go hout and hearn it then. You know 'ow to, you——' "

"When was this?"

"Some time back, Master Charles. In March, I think."

"In March?" Charles repeated indignantly. "In *March*! Do you dare to tell me that such infamy was going on then and you said nothing to me of it?"

"I couldn't rightly do that, sir," explained Thomas, "because of what I'd gone and promised Miss Kitty."

"What had you promised?"

"She made me swear, sir, and on the Book too, that no matter what might go hamiss at Frith Street I was to tell you nothing. I was always to say as she was well and 'appy, she said, that is of course if you hever went for to hask me."

"You should never have given such a promise, Thomas, much less have kept it."

"Oh, sir! As to giving it, you know yourself, Master Charles, what a way Miss Kitty 'as with 'er. And as to keeping it—well, I'd put me 'and on the Book."

"Very well then," said Charles impatiently. "And now for the rest. Has Jack gone with them to Ireland?"

"Oh, no, hindeed, Master Charles. 'E's gone the Lord knows where."

"The devil more likely. Tell me all that happened?"

"Well, Master Charles," began Thomas, "things went from bad to worse, they did. There was lodgers at times, but none of them stayed long, for what with the old gent *and* the young one, there was a pretty racket. Then in June, sir, Mr. Jack 'e brought two young sparks, friends of 'is seemingly, to the 'ouse and said as they was to be lodgers there. My word!" He drew a deep breath and looked scandalised.

"Go on, Thomas, go *on*."

"They weren't there long, sir, but long enough. And you can believe me, Master Charles, that, with all my duty to Miss Kitty and to you, sir, I was near quitting the place on Sally's account. For it was as near to nothing an 'ouse of hill-fame."

"Good God!"

"You may well say so, sir. Those young fellows—all three of 'em, for Mr. Jack 'e joined in too—did nothing whatever but drink and womanise, until one night——"

"Yes?"

"Well, one night there was a pretty set-out. Them two sparks 'ad a girl upstairs—an 'arlot if you'll pardon the hexpression, sir—and took to fighting over 'er. Miss Kitty went up for to horder 'em out and the old gent 'e took 'er part

proper, and would 'ave gone up too. But Master Jack sent the poor old fellow—'is own father too—flying with a push, and 'e shouts out hafter Miss Kitty, 'What do you complain of, sister? Why so nice? Such company must be familiar to you.' "

"The cur!" Charles muttered. "And then what happened?"

"I 'it 'im, sir," replied Thomas simply.

"Good fellow! And then?"

"Why then, sir, you'd 'ave thought Bedlam was loose. Before Mr. Jack could come back at me, those two young chaps burst out of their room fighting furious, and the girl with 'em, screaming and hegging 'em on something shocking. Poor old Mr. O'Brien was crying down in the parlour and my Sal was in 'ighstrikes on the kitchen stairs. Mr. Jack 'e was a-shouting and a-swearing and a-'itting out at every one until all of a sudden, what with the noise and all, the peelers was at the door, and precious glad I was to 'ear them."

"Did they stop the disturbance?"

"Not afore a proper shindy took place and Master Jack 'ad caught one of the police 'ard on the chin. Miss Kitty be'aved wonderful, Master Charles. Like a queen she was. 'Take these people out of my 'ouse,' she tells the constable, 'all of 'em.' And that meant 'er brother too, and small blame to her."

"Small blame indeed," muttered Charles.

"And then, sir," concluded Thomas, "they was all up afore the magistrates—that's to say the two lodgers and the younger—person, and Mr. Jack 'imself. They was all fined, and it's my belief that Mr. Jack would 'ave got a taste of gaol as well for striking the peeler, only for Miss Kitty speaking for 'im and paying 'is fine so prompt. Gawd alone knows where she got the money, poor lady!"

"That does not signify," Charles said sharply. "And so they—Kitty and her father—decided to go to Ireland."

"That's about the size of it, Master Charles. The brother 'e made hoff and nothing more was 'eard of 'im, and Miss Kitty she packed up 'er clothes and the old gent's, and put the 'ouse up to rent furnished. No one's took it yet, though."

"I see. But what of you and your wife?"

"Well, sir, Miss Kitty was hever so put about at throwing Sally out of hemployment. Cried 'ard she did, and even hinqured among such people she knew if they was in need of a cook-maid. But," he paused and smiled complacently, "I done better for us than that, sir."

"I'm glad to hear it, Thomas. What have you contrived?"

"I went to Mr. Mathews, sir, what 'as always treated me considerate, being a gentleman, and I asks 'im for some position at the theatre what would keep me busy at nights when you wouldn't require me, and would put a stop to Sally working which is what I've never fancied, sir."

"And he was able to help you?"

"Yes, hindeed, Master Charles. I'm to be chief dresser at Covent Garden Theatre now, sir, under Mr. Reuben. I've found a nice room for me and Sal right near the theatre. And what's more——" Thomas's smile became broader and even more complacent.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Mathews did go so far as to say, sir, that when there was a lot of supers needed, more than what they hemploy, 'e'd consider me! And, as I said to Sally, if that's not next door to being a hactor, then what is, sir?"

"I'm glad, Thomas, I'm very glad, indeed." Charles spoke these words with sincerity, but without any great interest; while he was naturally glad that matters had turned out so well for Thomas, his every thought just then was occupied with Kitty. He guessed that Jack's coarse and cruel behaviour to his sister resulted directly from her reckless admission of frailty, and this admission, as Charles knew only too well, had been made solely and entirely for his sake. Forgetting how important his promise to Rose had once seemed, and also that her attraction for him had been sufficient at the time to make their marriage not only a duty, but something of a pleasure, he could now only rail at himself for having married Rose at

all, for not having then and there thrown in his lot with Kitty.

At this tale of her misfortunes the love for her that Charles had honestly tried to suppress, increased a hundredfold; so much so that he even considered an immediate journey to Ireland. But, on remembering the promise which Kitty had exacted from Thomas, he saw in her consideration for himself a complete surrender of all chance of their mutual happiness, and also a strength of character and purity of purpose which shamed him. Kitty, with her careless ways, her lapses from virtue, her sordid origins, stood now in Charles's mind as a symbol of all that was sweet and true. And he knew, almost as if Kitty herself had reminded him, that his duty lay with Rose, whose confinement was drawing near, and with the friends who had given him his chance on the stage, and who were now ready once again to call upon his services.

Covent Garden Theatre, which was to reopen at the end of September, had by now been improved and renovated with all Madame Vestris's customary lavishness. She had given the artistic Mr. Bradwell a free hand with the decorations and the results were strikingly satisfactory. Every inch of gilding in the playhouse had been cleaned until it shone with the glitter of genuine gold; the panels of the boxes had been painted white, relieved by a delicate pink, while the boxes themselves were freshly lined with a handsome crimson moreen. The new wallpaper chosen for the back of the dress-circle displayed a most pleasing design of rose-coloured scrolls on a background of pale yellow and French grey; a magnificent ormolu chandelier illuminated the staircase leading to the boxes, and two others, also new and handsome, hung in the waiting-room for half-price visitors, which had itself been redecorated throughout. The old chairs had been removed from the dress-circle and replaced by upholstered benches, and, by way of a really startling innovation, the top, or shilling gallery, had been done away with altogether, the space previously occupied

by this now forming part of the ceiling. The "Garden" was indeed transformed.

Vestris, renowned for her prodigality, her preference for real flowers and flesh and blood animals where counterfeits might have sufficed, her reckless use of costly material, her insistence, even at the greatest expense, on absolute correctness of *decor* and costumes, had surpassed herself. The bills which were beginning to pour in would have dismayed most theatre managers, but both Madame and Charles Mathews, having a mutual love of profusion and a firm conviction of their new venture's success, remained perfectly hopeful and placid. They were indeed in this, as in other matters, a most happily matched pair, for neither reproached the other for extravagance, and both faced the ultimate deluge of debt with the most courageous philosophy.

Love's Labour's Lost, the first production at Covent Garden under the Vestris-Mathews management, was to take place on September 30th. Planché had designed the scenery and costumes, devoting his whole energy to the cause of beauty and verisimilitude; the cast was to include such accomplished actors as Mr. Anderson, Mr. Keely, Mr. Bartley and Mr. Meadows, and such charming ladies as Madame Vestris herself, Mrs. Charles, Mrs. Humby and Miss Rainforth.

But the piece, when it came to rehearsal, presented many more difficulties than had been expected. *Love's Labour's Lost* being less popular, and, therefore, less frequently acted, than the majority of plays by Shakespeare, it soon transpired that not one single member of the company had ever seen it and had, therefore, no means of emulating the success or of avoiding the errors of others; and as the date of production drew near there was a general feeling that the choice of one of the great dramatist's more familiar works might have been wiser. As it was too late, however, either to draw back, or to alter arrangements, the company, relying on the beauty of the *mise en scène* and encouraged by the vivacious hopefulness of Vestris, allowed themselves to be swayed by the management's

enthusiasm and looked forward to participating in an assured success.

The part of Biron was taken by Mr. Anderson. Since Charles Mathews had no rôle in this opening production, Charles Baron could the more easily console himself for not having one either, and was quite willing to act merely as the principal understudy, while whatever disappointment he may have felt was entirely dispelled by some words spoken to him during the final rehearsal by Mathews.

"What a good-natured fellow you are, Barty," he said. "Of all our company here you are the only one who does not grumble or go out for himself. And you'll be getting your reward soon enough, I can promise. Eliza and I have some fine plans for you."

Charles very naturally wanted to hear more of these plans, but Mathews only laughed at such curiosity, shook his head and refused to elaborate further.

The night of the 30th of September came. The house was crowded. The curtain swung back to such a roar of spontaneous applause that it seemed that a spectacular success must follow. But almost at once, in fact, before more than a dozen lines had been spoken, the temper of the audience, or of a certain section of it, changed most alarmingly and a disturbance broke out in the gallery—the lower one which was filled that night with the usual occupants of the demolished shilling gallery. These gods, even though the admission to their present seats had been reduced from two shillings to one and sixpence, were angry; their own particular perch was gone, the extra sixpence rankled, and feeling that the traditions of Covent Garden had been violated, they persisted in interruptions which were both noisy and abusive. Twice the play's action was stopped altogether; first William Vining, then Vestris herself, stepped forward to appeal for silence, to attempt some sort of apology to the malcontents. But the expatriated supporters of the shilling gallery would not listen. Not even the popularity of Vestris, not even the persuasiveness of her charming, rich-toned

voice, so dear to London playgoers, could prevail. The persons who believed themselves affronted had no use for fair words; they wanted their shilling seats; and it was not until a stage-hand came on bearing a hastily improvised placard, which promised the restoration of the top gallery by the following night, that the gods were placated and the play allowed to proceed.

Behind the scenes, in spite of the considerable nervousness and vexation induced in the players by such a display of antagonism, the matter was on the whole made light of; all agreed that the restitution of the shilling gallery would solve the problem, and that *Love's Labour Lost*, which had evidently been appreciated by the more decorous parts of the house, had a long and triumphant career in front of it. But only a few nights were needed to demonstrate the rashness of such optimism; the play, perhaps on account of its inauspicious opening, perhaps merely because of its obscurity when compared with much of Shakespeare's other work, failed so utterly to attract that Vestris was forced to admit the necessity of its withdrawal, "Love's labour," as Mathews remarked, had indeed been "lost."

As the next production, *Love* by Sheridan Knowles, was unrehearsed, Madame was obliged, pending the preparation of this new comedy, to fill in the time with sundry other pieces. She decided to put on first an old favourite from the Olympe repertoire, and to follow this by a few performances of *Romeo and Juliet*, choosing this tragedy on account of Miss Rainforth's presence in the company—this lady being well known as a very convincing and acceptable Juliet. In spite of many remonstrances Vestris proposed to sink her own charms in the Nurse, Mathews most appropriately took Mercutio, and so certain was Charles Baron that Romeo would fall to Mr. Anderson, that he could hardly believe his ears on being requested to play this jewel among romantic parts himself.

The decision to offer Romeo to a young and not very tutored actor had primarily been Madame's own, and was all of a piece with her passion for fidelity to an author's text.

"Anderson," she remarked to her husband, who, although delighted by the prospect of Charles's pleasure, could not restrain a few warnings as to his inexperience, "would be, in his way, faultless enough. But his way, you must admit, Charles, is not Shakespeare's. Rob Romeo of youth, *real* youth, and you rob him of all. He becomes, in fact, an impossible fool. Anderson has grace and a fine voice; he has intelligence too. But he would never make me believe him capable of Romeo's rashness."

"I begin to think you are right," observed Mathews.

"Of course I am right. Barty may lack skill. But he has served an apprenticeship and has his wits about him. Above, all, he has just that youth, that air, not of innocence perhaps, but rather of *unwisdom* that I've hoped for in every Romeo I've seen and not found yet. Will you agree to try him, Charles?"

"Yes, my dear, I will."

Charles, almost frantic between excitement, self-congratulation and fear, had very small time to observe what a languid show of interest Rose showed in his good fortune. Nearly every hour of his time was spent at the theatre, where he had not only to contend with his own nervousness but with a considerable hostility on the part of Juliet, for Miss Rainforth had expected Mr. Anderson to play her lover and chose to feel herself insulted by the choice of so unimportant a Romeo; an unpleasant situation for Charles to face, even though it served to show him how resolute and how true was the friendship of Mr. and Mrs. Mathews, both of whom supported him firmly, were eager to see justice done and to give Charles most valuable advice.

On the day of the performance, however, he had been reduced by his own diffidence and by the spite of Miss Rainforth to a pitiful condition of nerves. He left the theatre after the final rehearsal and hurried home to dinner, possessed now by the new fear of forgetting his lines. He had learned the part in York from pure love of it, yet to-day, during his final rehearsal

with an antagonistic Juliet, he had lost command of the words entirely.

He reached home to find dinner prepared, though in a most slovenly and unappetising fashion. Rose, her face drawn and her figure now grown heavy, gave him a languid greeting, declaring that she could eat nothing beyond some soup, a bowl of which was already beside her. She had been feeling wretchedly of late, filled with terror of her approaching ordeal and bitterly regretful that her mother had been left in ignorance of it; as Mrs. Clifford was still away from town, paying a number of country house visits, Rose hardly knew how to reach her if she would. She had angrily resisted Charles's offer of Sally as a daily attendant, basing this refusal on a certain jealousy of Thomas and some lingering suspicion that he formed a means of communication between Charles and Kitty O'Brien. Her distress and discontent had been much increased by the news that her husband was to play Romeo for, although she hardly believed him capable of making a pronounced success, there was always the fearful possibility that he might, and Rose knew that Charles, once justified in his ambition, would resist every inducement and persuasion to abandon the stage.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" she asked plaintively as her husband, with an abstracted air, sat down at the table.

Charles, between attempting to swallow some tepid and greasy mutton and to con over Romeo's lines, would certainly have chosen to remain silent, but in order to placate Rose and at the same time to serve himself, he pushed his plate away and handed her the book with a request that she would hear him through the balcony scene, a part of the play, which, owing to Miss Rainforth's persistent and unconcealed contempt, filled him with the greatest apprehension.

"Really, Charles," Rose protested, "I hardly feel well enough. I wish you would reserve such matters for the theatre and not bring them home with you. Do you not know the part?"

"I was word perfect once. But this scene troubles me. And

since Miss Rainforth seems positive that I shall fail in it, I'm the more anxious not to. You can understand that, love, surely."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. She certainly seems a most disagreeable woman, but then it's no fault of mine that you are involved with actresses. Where is the place?"

"I found it once," Charles said sharply. "The book was open when I gave it to you."

"I closed it by mistake. You had better find it for me again and don't speak so roughly, pray. My head is aching."

"Is it nothing to you whether I make a success or a failure to-night?" Charles demanded in a sudden outburst of irritation.

"Of course, Charles." Rose's voice softened a little; "but you know how Shakespeare wearies me. And I have so many things to think of. It is not very long now before——" She paused and looked significantly at her husband.

"I know, dear, I know. Please do not think me so selfish as to forget it. But you have a week or so still, Rose, and just for to-night—I—now, if you would be so very good as to hear me. I've found the place again. You have only to say the cues."

Charles returned the book to Rose and began the scene. When he had reached "bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds and sails upon the bosom of the air," Rose, in a monotonous tone of voice read out, "O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou, Romeo?"

"No, no," Charles interrupted her. "The cue only. Not Juliet's whole speech. There is no time for that. Can't you understand?"

"How ill-tempered you are," retorted Rose. "I only do this to oblige you."

"Is it so great a favour?" Charles asked with some bitterness.

"I think it is. I have felt ill all day. And I have been in great pain too, most of the afternoon. I feel sure the child will be born soon. To-night perhaps while you are at the theatre. And then what would become of me?" Rose began to whimper.

"Oh, for God's sake," began Charles angrily. Then, gaining command of himself he spoke as reasonably as he knew how to. "Rose, my dear, listen to me. You have had these pains before and we have consulted Doctor Foster, who puts them down to nervousness, as you know. He does not expect our baby for another two weeks at least, but if you wish the nurse to come sooner I will send for her. I will send for her to-morrow."

"Why not to-night?"

"To-night? Why, Rose, I—there is so little time. The doctor said——"

She broke in angrily. "I see how it is. This wretched part, this stupid Romeo, is all that matters. You have no time to fetch the nurse. I'm of no consequence. I'm only your wife. I might die for all that you care!"

Charles sprang to his feet. He could endure no more and snatching up his hat and the book, made for the door. As he opened it he flung at Rose over his shoulder, "I'll send the nurse to you to-night, never fear."

He ran out of the house and made his way swiftly towards a courtyard off Oxford Street where the nurse lived, and where, on knocking, he was told that the woman was from home but would be sent direct to Henrietta Street on her return. Charles had now done all he could, and since he was quite positive that the child would not be born that night, nor indeed until some weeks hence, did not feel unduly worried. On observing a clock, he realised that, owing to his extremely curtailed dinner, it was not yet time to go to the theatre, and, finding himself in the neighbourhood of Soho, he yielded to a sudden desire and walked towards Frith Street. His overwrought mind, infected as it was with the unreasoning passion of Shakespeare's most tragic lover and filled besides with anxieties and distresses of his own, was ready to play him tricks; to arouse in him a strong, yet baseless hope that Kitty might have returned from Ireland, that she might even answer his knock and be ready with the encouragement and consolation he stood in such bitter need of. He quickened his steps, until by the time he

turned into Frith Street, he was actually running, and paused at length, panting and breathless, outside the O'Briens' dark and too evidently uninhabited house. With a sob of disappointment, speedily followed by scorn for his own folly, Charles gazed up at the shuttered windows of Number Seventeen. Memories of Kitty rushed through his mind—clearest of all, the time when he had been called upon to take Mr. Brougham's part in *A Dream of the Future*. As he recalled the help she had given him, the hours she had spent in teaching him the part, as he saw her in his mind's eye running beside him to the theatre, her bonnet awry, the book in her hands, and heard her eager promptings, the contrast between Kitty and Rose revealed itself too cruelly. Charles turned away. He was alone now, and as to Romeo, not a soul, outside Mr. and Mrs. Mathews and perhaps Daniel, cared whether he failed or triumphed. He started down the street, then with a swift impulse and still perhaps a little beside himself, retraced his steps.

"Kitty," he cried aloud, gazing up at the desolate house. "Kitty, I'm to play Romeo. Are you glad, Kitty? Oh, my dear, are you glad?"

Hearing the titters of some children on the opposite pavement and abashed by his own emotion, Charles walked resolutely away and, with his head held high, made his way to Covent Garden Theatre.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Family Man

It was William John who, having himself learned the fact from Daniel, informed Margaret that Charles was to play Romeo at Covent Garden; Daniel had been allotted a place in the Mathews's box but, on account of a long-standing engagement with some business acquaintances, was obliged to defer his visit to the theatre until the next night, and William John, on being told of this, surprised Daniel by asking if he might have the order.

"Does thee think then of going to the play?" Daniel inquired.

"I might," William John replied calmly.

Daniel asked no further questions, but gave him the order, which for some little while William John did actually consider making personal use of; but on the day of the performance his mother seemed far from well, and as he had by now constituted himself her special attendant and protector, he saw little chance of being able to leave her that evening. John Baron had gone to pay a short visit to Janey and her husband at Esher, and was not expected home until the following evening, so, as the result of a little private cogitation, William John went upstairs to Margaret's sitting-room.

After a few commonplace remarks he laid the order for Covent Garden down on her work-table, and said quietly, "Our brother is to play Romeo to-night."

"I know," replied Margaret who had already obtained this information from the newspaper; and she added curtly, "What of that?"

"It will be a very great moment for Charles," observed William John, still speaking with the utmost placidity. "Every young actor must dream of playing Romeo."

"I know nothing of actors, old or young."

"No, sister, nor do I. But to assume Charles's pleasure at such an opportunity is the merest common sense."

"I hardly think it necessary," remarked Margaret coldly, "to waste common sense upon such a subject."

But William John saw her glance with furtive interest at the order, and he said, "Daniel gave me that. He is unable to use it."

"And so are thee."

"That is true, I'm afraid. Mamma feels so poorly to-day that I hardly like to leave her. Yet it seems a pity to waste a good place at Covent Garden."

"Daniel has chosen to waste it," Margaret said sharply.

"Not voluntarily. He is pre-engaged for to-night, but has promised to see *Romeo and Juliet* to-morrow."

After a moment's silence, Margaret asked, "Why has thee brought this thing to me? I can hardly give it to one of the servants under the circumstances."

"I have not suggested that thee should give it to one of the servants. As this order is for a place in a private box it would be most improper to do so."

"What does thee suggest then, I should do with it?"

"I make no suggestion at all," answered William John; he smiled a little impishly and left the room.

Margaret, immediately taking up the order, examined it carefully; she then replaced it on the table and prepared to go about her household duties. But at the door she paused, returned to the work-table, picked up the Covent Garden order and put it into her reticule.

It became speedily apparent to the audience who had that night assembled in Covent Garden Theatre principally for the purpose of seeing Miss Rainforth's Juliet, that the young and obscure Romeo was to be the star of the evening. Charles's first lines were certainly ill-spoken, and he gave evidence of a diffidence and uncertainty which boded ill. The exaltation

which had uplifted him outside the empty house in Soho, when he had called upon Kitty endured for a while, but not sufficiently. By the time he was dressed and had put the rouge on his face, Charles's fears and anxieties had reconquered him; nor was his state of mind improved by a supercilious glance from Miss Rainforth as she passed him on the staircase or by the inevitable gloom of Reuben, who had wrung his hand in a most commiserating manner and exclaimed sadly, "Bear up, Mr. Barty, bear up. They won't expect much of you."

By the accident of some flurry behind the scenes, neither Vestris nor Charles Mathews reached the wings in time to wish Charles good fortune or to express their confidence in him. He made his entrance in a condition of blank despair, feeling far more nervous now than on the occasion of his first appearance at the Olympic. He spoke at first so low, than an angry voice from the gallery adjured him "Speak up, there. Speak up!" and it was this unmannerly though justifiable interruption which, freakishly enough, supplied the very spur that had been wanting. Charles, filled with a sudden hatred for the critic, with a furious resolve to refute the criticism, raised his voice, swung almost unknowingly into the rhythm and meaning of his words and became from the very force of this angry effort—Romeo. His eulogy of Juliet poured forth, and he brought to her praises such sincerity and such longing that the scene ended amid a burst of surprised applause.

That sound, the actor's battle-cry, settled Charles Baron's fate. He knew he had done well, knew too, that he could do better, and from that very moment played straight into his hearers' hearts. The anxious balcony scene became a joy, the contemptuous Miss Rainforth became Kitty; in pleading with his counterfeit love Charles spoke beyond her; his voice, which had great natural beauty, seemed to come from his soul and he himself, could he be said to think at all, believed that it reached across the Irish channel. By that telepathy which exists between a player and his audience Charles sensed that the house was with him. He had captured Covent Garden.

In Mrs. Mathews's box Margaret Baron, her face very pale, leaned forward. She had never before seen a serious play, for by the time her taste had outgrown Astleys, her father had put his veto on all theatrical entertainments. She knew the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* well enough, but to see it played upon the stage transformed inanimate pages of print into a very living picture of love and sorrow.

At Charles's too evidently timid entrance, at the rough command to speak up, her heart had all but turned over. She believed she had done this wild thing, made this imprudent excursion to Covent Garden merely to behold her brother; but she knew at the moment when his voice faltered that she had come to see his triumph and must hide her face at his failure. And then, so suddenly for no known reason, failure seemed far away and triumph certain. As she listened to Charles's fine voice and watched his graceful movements, instead of yearning over him she revered him. The play gripped her imagination; the reckless boy and girl passion shamed her; she longed to have been capable herself of such a yielding to such love. Romeo and his Juliet were to die as she knew, yet how much better to die for love than to renounce it.

The tomb scene came at last. The tears streamed unrestrained down Margaret's cheeks. The house was strangely silent; not a cough or a rustle disturbed the last fervid speech of Romeo:

"Eyes look your last!

Arms take your last embrace."

Charles's voice rang out with a clear passionate wildness. A woman seated beside Margaret sobbed audibly. But Margaret's own tears were not for Romeo at the point of death, or for Juliet dead already. They were for herself and for Daniel.

The play ended. The applause rose to a roar. Charles was called for again and again and Margaret, seeing the shy,

excited youth who had so swiftly replaced the "star-crossed lover," came slowly to her senses. As she watched his wondering recognition of the audience's enthusiasm she once more saw her brother, the little wilful boy whom she had cared for from a baby, whom she had shielded from his father's sternness, the headstrong young man who had left her and whom through angry jealousy she had at last abandoned. She rose to her feet, stumbled over the other occupants of the box and hurried out of the theatre.

She must see Charles. That was her only thought. She had forgotten the awkwardness and impropriety of having come unattended to the play; forgotten the promise to her father; forgotten the more trivial perplexity of finding the hired coach which was to wait for her. She must see Charles.

After making some hasty inquiries she found her way to the back of the theatre and inquired for Charles of the stage-door keeper. The man eyed her in some bewilderment; he was unaccustomed to women who came alone to the stage-door in search of the gentleman performers. At some theatres this was usual enough, but not at Covent Garden. Mr. Macready, the last lessee, had been exceedingly strict, Madame Vestris was no less so. Yet Margaret, as the man could see, was a lady; she was quiet in her manner, not very young and dressed with an expensive sobriety. She was also, by her speech, a Quakeress. This was very strange, he thought, and since he could not by any stretch of imagination put her down as a wanton, the door-keeper decided she must be a religious fanatic come to convert Mr. Barty. Now this, he resolved, upon the night of such a triumph, would never do, so he told Margaret civilly that Charles was undoubtedly dressing and could hardly be expected therefore to receive a lady in his room.

"It's of no consequence," Margaret said. "I can wait for him outside, I suppose."

"There's nowt I can do to stop you, ma'am," the door-keeper replied glumly and resumed his pipe.

Margaret stepped out into the street and stood there

patiently, until oppressed by fear that Charles might leave the theatre by another door, and alarmed by the proximity of a man who was lounging in the street beside her, his hat pulled over his face, she returned to the doorkeeper.

"Can thee tell me how long Mr. Barty will be?" she asked timidly. "I—I am his sister."

"His sister, ma'am. Lord, why didn't you say so before? Why not come up, ma'am? The young gentleman should be changed by now."

About to accept his invitation, Margaret drew back; she supposed there would be other people in Charles's room, and could not bear that their meeting should be public.

"I prefer to wait," she said; "but could thee perhaps inform my brother that I am here."

"Certainly, ma'am," the man replied, and emerging from his tiny room, he went away down a passage.

Margaret did not venture into the street again, but remained in the doorway. After a very short time the sound of running feet came down the passage and Charles appeared; he had hurried through his dressing, curtailing congratulations, in order to return as soon as possible to Rose, on whose account his conscience was uneasy.

"Peg," he cried out on seeing Margaret. "Oh, my dear Peg."

Margaret ran to his arms. "I saw thee, Charles," she told him, sobbing. "I have been in the theatre. Ah, had I but known, my dear, that thee could act like that!"

"But, Peg, did you come alone? Where were you sitting? And have you been standing here for long? How did you contrive it?"

They had emerged from the theatre now into the street, where before Margaret could reply to Charles's eager questions, the man whose presence had disturbed her stepped forward and tapped Charles on the shoulder. "Mr. Charles Baron or Barty?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes. What do you want?"

"A little matter of thirty-nine pound, five shillings and ninepence, if you would be so good."

"This beggar has lofty notions," Margaret exclaimed.

But Charles repeated blankly, "Thirty-nine pounds, five shillings and ninepence?"

"Yes, sir. I'm no beggar, mum. I'm a sheriff's officer. Here is the writ, sir. You must pay the money, you know, or come with me."

"How dare you?" Margaret demanded.

"Thirty-nine pound, five shillings and ninepence," the sheriff's officer said again with the greatest stolidity, "owing to Madame Celeste."

"But that——" Charles began; then checked himself, unwilling to betray Rose's extravagance to Margaret.

"You know the law, sir, I make no doubt," the man continued. "All debts what's contracted by a married lady can fall on her 'usband. I don't like to see it myself, sir, for the women should be taught a sharp lesson, but the law's the law."

"That's enough," Charles said coldly. "I am afraid I haven't that amount of money about me."

"Never supposed you would 'ave, sir. The theatrical profession, eh? So I must trouble you to come with me then."

"Stop!" cried Margaret. "Thee surely does not mean to take my brother—this gentleman to prison."

"Lord no, mum. Not for the present, at any rate. I'll be taking 'im to my own 'ouse and a very nice respectable 'ouse it is too."

"But there is no need," she told him. "I will pay this money gladly. I will pay it the very first thing in the morning."

"Margaret, please——" Charles started to protest, but she waved him aside.

"Does thee not understand me?" she asked the officer. "There is no need at all to arrest Mr. Baron. The money shall be paid early to-morrow."

"I don't doubt it, mum. And I'll be very glad to 'ave it done. But to-night's not to-morrow, you know, and the

gentleman must come with me. That's orders. I should have taken 'im sooner by rights, before the play begun, but I was delayed getting here."

Margaret turned to Charles. "This is my fault," she exclaimed bitterly. "I have impoverished thee by stopping the money."

"Stopping what money?"

"The allowance. The twenty guineas a month. Oh, Charles, forgive me. I was angry about—about thy marriage."

"But," replied Charles bewildered, "you did not stop the money. It came to me regularly. And this trouble has come about merely because we—because I have been imprudent."

He looked searchingly at Margaret, but she could make no answer. She guessed immediately what Daniel had done.

The officer meanwhile was growing impatient. "If you please, sir, we ought to be going. My 'ouse is not far from 'ere. We can walk it."

"I will come with thee, Charles," said Margaret eagerly.

"No, Peg, no. You will do no such thing. But—" he hesitated; then, a little awkwardly, went on, "If you really wish to help me, dear, there—there is something else."

"Anything, Charles, thee knows that."

"Give us one moment, pray," Charles said to the sheriff's man, and, drawing Margaret aside, he lowered his voice, to ask her urgently, "Peg, if you would but pay a short visit to my lodgings. They are very near. If you would do that just to—to reassure my wife."

Margaret stiffened; her eyes flashed with anger at Rose's extravagance which had landed Charles in such a sorry financial predicament.

But Charles persisted, "It is a great deal to ask of you, Peg, I know. But Rose is expecting a child, very shortly now. You will find the nurse with her. There is no need to stay, only to reassure her, to say I will be home to-morrow and that all went well to-night. Peg, will you do it?"

"Yes," answered Margaret, but her voice was hard.

Just as Charles raised her hand to kiss it, Thomas ran out of the theatre calling to him. "Master Charles! Sir! Will you not come to the Green Room? They are all hasking for you. Madame has sent me to find you." He observed Margaret and his mouth fell open with astonishment.

But Margaret, seeing with joy that the faithful fellow still served her brother, held out her hand, asking warmly, "How are thee, Thomas?"

As another exclamation of impatience came from the officer, Charles explained the situation briefly to Thomas, requesting him to walk with Margaret to Henrietta Street and to arrange, after her visit to Rose, to see her safely home. He then turned to the sheriff's officer and with the briefest of good-byes walked off with him. But Margaret followed, caught at the arm of the sheriff's man and, without a trace of her usual reserve, said to him, "The money will be paid to-morrow. As early as possible. Thee will let my brother go then, will thee not? Thee will not prevent him from playing at the theatre to-morrow night? Thee must not do that."

Charles could not help smiling at Margaret's anxiety lest he should miss a performance; whatever else his Romeo might have achieved it did seem at least to have convinced his sister that Charles Barty was no mean actor.

The officer smiled in a confidential manner at Margaret, replying affably, "Now, don't you fret, lady. If the money's paid, well and good. The young gent can go to America then if 'e's a mind to, for all the right I'd 'ave to stop 'im."

Saying this, he raised his hat most gallantly and walked away with Charles. Margaret stood looking after them, with tears in her eyes, until, struggling against her extreme unwillingness to visit Rose, she turned to Thomas and asked him to escort her to Charles's lodgings.

After they had walked for some few yards in silence, Margaret stopped suddenly, and said, "Thomas, I have thought of something. There is no need for my brother to remain in

that man's custody, even for to-night. Thee knows, of course, where Mr. Daniel Ellesmere's house is?"

"Yes, Miss Margaret."

"Then go to him at once. Tell him what has happened, and ask him for the money. The sum is thirty-nine pounds, five shillings and ninepence. I will refund it to my cousin to-morrow." And Margaret, recalling how much she stood in Daniel's debt already, blushed as she spoke.

"I'll go and gladly, miss. But you must let me walk with you first to 'Enrietta Street. The old landlady may well have gone to bed and I 'ave a door key."

"Let me take it then. And do not waste more precious time in coming with me."

"I couldn't do that, Miss Margaret," replied Thomas solemnly. "Master Charles wouldn't never forgive me if 'e 'eard as I left you in the streets alone at this time of night."

"Thee are a good soul, Thomas. But let us walk faster; much faster."

The remainder of the very short distance between Covent Garden Theatre and Henrietta Street was finished at a sort of trot. When they paused outside Mrs. Hardwick's house for Thomas to take out his key, Margaret startled him by an abrupt question. "Is my brother happy?" she asked.

Between surprise that so intimate a query should be put to him by stately Margaret Baron and uncertainty as to how best to answer it, Thomas was struck dumb. He fumbled with the key before beginning to say uncomfortably, "Well, as to that, miss——"

Margaret cut him short. "No matter. Open the door quickly, Thomas, and be on thy way." Her anger against Rose flamed up again for Thomas, by his hesitation, had plainly answered her question.

"When thee has been to Mr. Ellesmere's," she instructed him, "come back here immediately. I must know what my cousin said and what has been done. So I will wait for thee here, Thomas. Now go, and quickly."

Thomas flung open the front door, revealing the dimly lit hall and staircase.

"It's the first floor front, Miss Margaret," he explained. "Shall I go hup and hinform Mrs. Charles that you're 'ere?"

"No, no. I can announce myself. Do hurry now to Mr. Ellesmere's, pray."

"Very good, miss," replied Thomas. He waited just until Margaret had entered the house, then set off at the best pace possible towards the city.

Margaret surveyed the close, dark hall disdainfully, feeling, as she walked upstairs, more antagonistic towards her step-sister-in-law than ever, uncertain, too, of what she should say to her, regretting the necessity of saying anything whatever. She found, on the landing above, a door which appeared to lead to what Thomas had described as the first-floor front, and after a moment's hesitation she knocked.

There was no answer. Margaret knocked again. She waited, still heard no answer, and entered the room, which was in its customary condition of uncomfortable disorder. The furniture was dusty, the dinner dishes had not been cleared away. A smoky lamp burned on the table. The fire was out. And the room was empty.

With a shiver of disgust Margaret looked around her. What a home for her brother! She thought of the airy, spotlessly kept rooms at Bryanston Square and shivered again. How could Charles live thus, how could he? And how could any wife, even so spoilt a creature as Rose, permit her husband to endure such squalid discomfort? And where was Rose?

At that very moment Margaret heard the faint but unmistakable sound of a groan. She started. The sound came again and came; she was now positive, from the next room; returning to the landing, Margaret listened attentively outside an adjoining door. She heard another groan, then another, and this time, without troubling to knock, she walked straight into the bedroom. This, too, was disordered, and very cold. But it was better lit than the parlour, and on the bed, white-

faced, fully dressed, her hair tangled, her cheeks wet with tears, lay Rose. As the door opened she raised herself a little, looking eagerly towards the threshold as if expecting some one, and seeing Margaret there, she stared at her dazedly, without showing any surprise whatever. But, in a voice urgent and hoarse, she said, "Get the doctor. Get him quickly."

Margaret, looking back at Rose, knew what was soon to happen. She did not even consider the possibility of unnecessary panic on the girl's part or of a false alarm. She knew. For one swift second she was happy because Rose would have to suffer. Yet in a flash the happiness was gone, leaving only an impersonal anxiety, a strong desire to help.

"Where does the doctor live?" she asked briskly without the preliminary of any greeting. "Is there some one in the house who can go for him?"

"I don't know," Rose answered, her voice low and helpless. "I've heard no one for hours. I think the servant-girl has gone. Much earlier I heard her and Mrs. Hardwick screaming at each other and then the street door slammed."

"Mrs. Hardwick? Is that the landlady?"

"Yes. She may be in the kitchen. I don't know. Charles said he would send the nurse. I——" Rose broke off and cried out loudly as another pain tore at her.

Margaret stayed with her through it; she held her hands, even spoke soothingly, waiting until the last spasm of agony was over before she rose and said, "I'll go downstairs and find this woman. There must be some one here who can fetch the doctor or nurse. Or both of them perhaps. Where do they live?"

When Rose had given her the addresses, Margaret made her way to the kitchen; the house was so oddly silent that it did seem as if no one beyond herself and Rose were in it. She descended the evil-smelling basement stairs and was relieved to see a gleam of light which was showing under the kitchen door. The landlady, thought Margaret, must be there. She

was. But Margaret, seeing the blowsy figure who sat at the kitchen table, her head upon her arms, hearing Mrs. Hardwick's stertorous breathing and smelling the stench of spirits that filled the kitchen, knew that this drunken creature would be of no service to her. With a faint hope she shook the woman, who lifted her head once, stared dully at Margaret out of bleary eyes, then with a muttered "Eh?" sank back heavily into her former position.

Margaret, who had observed that the kitchen fire was burning moderately well, stoked it up, put on a kettle of water, and recalling the chilliness of Rose's room, collected some wood, coal and paper in a bucket and started upstairs again. In the hall she paused to open two doors, both of which revealed nothing more promising than two darkened rooms; and as she stood considering whether or not to enlist the help of a passer-by to fetch the doctor, a cry, a veritable scream this time, came from above. Margaret grasped her bucket and dashed upstairs.

From that moment the labour pains came faster, and each time with a more searing sharpness; Rose, writhing and twisting on the bed, had neither the capacity nor the will to endure them bravely. She seemed hardly human, merely the very incarnation of pain and fear, clinging to Margaret while the agony lasted, sobbing, screaming and even reviling Charles.

Margaret heard her without anger. It mattered very little that this terrified, moaning girl was Charles's wife. But the child so soon to come was Charles's child, and this did matter. Margaret swore to herself that Charles's child should be born alive—not that only, but strong, perfect, unmarred. No accident must happen. The mother's panic must not hurt the baby.

So during the brief periods of respite Margaret worked at high pressure. She undressed Rose, helped her into a nightgown and smoothed the tumbled bed. She lit the fire, fetched up the kettle from the kitchen, and, after a vain search for

clean towels and linen, took from a drawer a pile of Rose's delicate lace and cambric underwear and tore it relentlessly to pieces. She strove to make the room a little cleaner, but had no chance to do it. For time was precious and seemed to be rushing past her.

At last, after gripping Rose's hand, through one long agony, Margaret's courage wavered. How could she, hampered as she was by utter inexperience and by such difficult conditions, do what she had resolved? How could she bring Charles's child safe and unscathed into the world? She knew nothing. She would be helpless when the moment of birth arrived.

Taking advantage of Rose's utter exhaustion, she escaped from the room unobserved. She ran at full speed down the stairs and flung the street door open. There on the opposite pavement, walking towards her, was a man. What kind of man he might be Margaret neither knew or cared. A thief, a cut-throat would serve her purpose, would he but do her errand. She called out loudly. The man started, stopped, and after a moment's hesitation came across to her. As he approached Margaret saw by the street lamp's aid that he looked decent—no night prowler certainly. She poured the story out, gave him the address of both midwife and doctor, and implored him to bring back one or the other.

The man was a friend indeed. He listened; without any words beyond "I'll do it, lady. Keep your heart up," was gone; and Margaret, trembling with relief, unduly elated by the thought that help was near, ran back to Rose, who was crying out for her already. But when she reached the bedroom Margaret knew that the doctor could not, save by a miracle, be there in time. And as she grasped clearly that more, far more, would be expected of her than the comparatively simple tasks of comforting Rose, heating water, and preparing clean linen, Margaret recoiled. A feeling of nausea overcame her, followed by a violent impulse to fly from the room and never to enter it again. How could she do this thing—how perform unaided the offices of both doctor and midwife, how witness

every shocking circumstance of childbirth, how deal with whatever accident or disaster that might occur?

"I can't," she told herself. "I can't."

Rose screamed hideously.

Margaret shut her eyes and saw as she did so what was almost a vision. She saw Priscilla Ellesmere, the gentle, immaculate Priscilla, who, as she knew, had dealt with many such an emergency in the cottages of her tenants; who had even held the hands and soothed the terrors of a young servant girl bearing a love-child. Margaret saw also, as in a flash, another woman, a greater—Elizabeth Fry, passing with unharmed innocence and dignity through all the filth of Newgate.

"Oh, God," prayed Margaret, discarding her unbelief. "Oh, God, help me."

Then as Rose shrieked again, Margaret forgot everything but what she had to do.

It seemed many hours later, but was in reality hardly one, before a violent knocking came at the street door; Rose lay, exhausted, while Margaret knelt gazing at the tiny but perfectly formed boy whom she had placed upon a nest of cushions near the fire. She had washed the child, recalling how her cousin Priscilla had said this should be done. He seemed to be sleeping, and barricading him yet more carefully with cushions, Margaret went down to the door. There stood the doctor, who ran swiftly past her and up the stairs. The passer-by, the good Samaritan, having performed his merciful errand, had gone. But, as Margaret prepared to close the door and follow the doctor, a coach drew up. First Daniel, then Thomas, sprang out of it.

"Daniel!" She called his name with such eagerness, such tenderness even, that he rushed forward and caught both her hands.

"Why, Margaret," he exclaimed, seeing her distraught condition and not comprehending the cause of such extreme distress. "Thee must not fret so. I have the money with me.

I will go at once to Charles. I merely called here first to see thee, my dear, to hear more of this trouble and to reassure thee."

"Charles? Money?" repeated Margaret vaguely. Then, in a voice almost hysterical, she cried, "He will need money now, indeed. He has a son."

Daniel supported her while Thomas, respectfully dumbfounded, exclaimed, "Gawd Almighty!"

"I must go upstairs," Margaret said. "Come with me, Daniel. Will thee wait in the parlour. I must see the doctor. I do not know yet whether what I did was right. But I think it was, Daniel. The little child is alive and well. And I think Rose will recover."

"Margaret!" Daniel paused on the staircase in astonishment. "Does thee mean to tell me that thee has been here alone? No nurse, no doctor. That thee has——"

Margaret interrupted him. "Go to the parlour, cousin. I will come to thee. Only let me speak to the doctor first."

Daniel, filled with amazement and a far stronger feeling, paced the parlour. He could not believe the woman who had just left him was Margaret—Margaret who had grown lately so coldly placid, so wrapped within herself; so chillingly self-possessed.

He had not long to wait before she came to him. In her arms, wrapped in a blanket, she carried Charles's son. Her face was very pale, her hair hung lankly about her cheeks, still damp with sweat; upon her grey velvet gown were splashes of blood. Yet to Daniel she was beautiful—more beautiful than he had ever thought her before.

She looked down tenderly at the tiny creature she held; with a pretty pride, almost as though the baby were her own, she displayed him to Daniel.

"He is perfect," she whispered. "No harm has come to him. I—I did not know what to do, Daniel, yet I did it. See, what a beautiful baby."

But as she spoke she swayed. Daniel quickly took the child from her. He laid the bundle down on the sofa and put his arms round Margaret.

"My dear," he said gently, "I love thee. I love thee more than ever."

"And I love thee, Daniel," answered Margaret.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

A New Commandment

JOHN BARON, returning next day from his visit to Janey, reached London a little before noon; he went direct to the bank, and on arriving at Bryanston Square, shortly before the hour at which he usually dined, was informed by the footman that Daniel Ellesmere awaited him in the study.

John walked slowly and wearily upstairs. It was Margaret, not Daniel or any other visitor, whom he wished to see, and Margaret had not even come down yet to greet him; but as Daniel's errand, according to the footman, was an urgent one, John, connecting urgency with business, put this, as was his habit, above all other considerations. In the study he found Daniel standing before the fireplace and the two men greeted each other quietly. Daniel, observing John with more closeness than usual, saw that he had aged; he even felt a twinge of pity for Margaret's father, but he crushed this weakness sternly. He had no wish to pity John Baron, who, by his own harsh selfishness, had caused such suffering to others, and yet Daniel, being himself compassionate and tolerant by nature, experienced some difficulty in maintaining the spirit of defiance and indignation with which he had entered the house.

"Ah, Daniel," said John kindly enough, "it is some time since I have seen thee. Is anything amiss? My servant told me that thy business was pressing."

"It is," answered Daniel curtly.

John glanced at the clock. "It is nearly half-past five," he remarked. "Wilt thou not stop and dine with us? We could then perhaps discuss this business afterwards. I have been to Esher to visit Janey and I have not seen Margaret yet since my return."

Daniel, guessing that John had not yet seen William John or Sophia either and that this omission did not signify, allowed himself a small, grim smile before saying quietly, "It is about Margaret that I have come to see thee, Cousin John."

"About Margaret?" There was a flash in John's eye, a note of alarm in his voice.

"Yes," replied Daniel. "Margaret is from home. Did thee know that?"

"Margaret from home? Why, and for what purpose? I knew nothing of this."

"No?" For a just man and a man of peace, Daniel put into this one brief word a certain insolence.

"What has thou come here to tell me, Daniel Ellesmere?" John demanded roughly. "What misfortune has befallen my daughter?"

"No misfortune, I can assure thee. Margaret is with—with her brother."

"Her brother? But—thou meanest, Daniel—I think that thou must mean with her younger *step*-brother."

"I do," answered Daniel. "Margaret is with Charles. She will remain with him now for some little time. Less on his own account, let me say, than on his wife's."

"His wife's? I did not know that Ch—that my younger son had a wife. But that does not concern me."

"Does not concern thee!"

"No. Nothing which has to do with my younger son concerns me."

"And why not?" Daniel asked angrily. "Charles is thy son. Thee can never escape from that fact, surely. He has been married for some while. To my cousin, Rose Clifford."

"That too," muttered John; he turned his face away and would not look at Daniel.

"And now," Daniel continued, "they have——"

"Stop!" cried John. "I wish to hear nothing of them. *Nothing*, I tell thee."

Daniel, ignoring this outburst, said calmly, "Charles

has a little son. Thy grandson, remember. The child was born——”

“Stop, I say!”

“The child was born last night. Margaret was there with the mother. She is still there.”

“How came she to go to them?” John Baron asked thickly. “Did that puppy, that spoilt boy, come whining here to fetch her in my absence?”

With a ring of pride in his voice, Daniel answered, “No. She went of her own free will. She went first to see Charles act at Covent Garden.”

“No, *no!*”

“And then to visit his wife. Charles was—er—detained. And it was Margaret who brought this child—thy grandson, I repeat—into the world.”

“Wilt thou stop, Daniel?” John was breathing heavily.

“When I have finished, Cousin John, and not before,” retorted Daniel. “Margaret has begged me to tell thee——”

John Baron interrupted him once again; his face white with passion, his eyes blazing, he spoke. “That is enough, Daniel Ellesmere. Whatever she may have begged thee to tell me can remain unsaid. I have no wish for any plea or message from my daughter. I have done with her. And thou canst tell her so. She has broken her word to me, taken advantage of my absence from home to go to that—that idol of hers. That wretched boy, whose character she herself has ruined. She was not even content to visit him—and that was evil enough. But she must needs go to the *theatre*; I suppose to glory in the degradation of my principles and our good name. And, for all I know, this may have been going on for months. For all I know she may have constantly visited her step-brother on the sly.”

“I can reassure thee completely on that point,” Daniel said coldly, “for she has not.”

“I do not want thy reassurance,” John shouted. “What difference can it make? I shall not see Margaret again. I have

no wish to see her again. I prefer to forget her, to forget certainly that I ever loved her."

"That, thee never did," said Daniel with a quiet decisiveness.

John was momentarily startled out of his anger. "What didst thou say?" he faltered.

"I said thee never loved Margaret. Nor did thee, Cousin John. Thee merely loved thyself. No, let me finish." Daniel's voice gained in authority as if compelling John to listen to him. "Thee has never once, I think, thought of Margaret's own happiness. Thee has shut her away from gaiety and youth, and has made her life hideous by thy jealousy."

"Jealousy? Thou usest strange words, Daniel."

"Possibly. But true ones. Thee were jealous of Charles as a little boy; can thee deny it? And thee broke Margaret's spirit by deliberate harshness to her brother. It was thee who stood between myself and Margaret; her fear of what Charles might suffer at thy hands forced her to break with me. Thee had no affection for Charles thyself, yet thee refused to allow Margaret and me to take him. Thee has always tortured Margaret, through Charles; God knows to what extent, if thee does not."

Almost mildly John said, "If I punished my son, it was for his own good only."

"Oh, no," replied Daniel scornfully. "That is the merest self-deception. It was jealousy that caused thy severity to that boy. Can thee deny it?"

John stared at Daniel dully and said nothing.

"Then," continued Daniel, "there came another break. The break between thee and Charles, between Charles and his home."

"And between Charles and Margaret," muttered John Baron.

"So thee thought at the time. And so thee certainly hoped. But let me tell thee this—the break was incomplete. Margaret, I can swear to thee, never saw her brother again until yesterday, but I saw him. And I gave her news of him. I hoped, I

have always hoped, to bring them together. Now they are together."

"Why, Daniel, didst thou work to that end?"

"Because I love Margaret. Because at the time our engagement was broken I did her a great wrong. I thought her weak; I thought her attachment to Charles mere selfish folly. I despised her for it. And I have continued for years to think ill of her on that account. I did not understand, until last night, how little she was to blame, compared with thee."

"Last night?"

"Yes. We sat talking together until dawn. Oh, Margaret was not disloyal to her father, pray believe that. There is no disloyalty in her nature. But she told me much that I had known nothing of; all that she had suffered, or rather been made to suffer, through Charles. And then I knew. For I could read thy influence in all of it, Cousin John."

John's anger rose again, seeming to reanimate him. "How darest thou say so?" he flashed. "I have always loved my daughter, as strongly as I loved her mother before her."

"Margaret's mother," Daniel said steadily, "was thy wife. She had a wife's pleasures and privileges; she died young certainly, but she lived fully. We have always respected thy loss and thy sorrow, Cousin. But why, because of thy love for thy wife, has thee made a creature of her daughter? Margaret needed a father's love, not a father's infatuation. But I shall not go on. There is no need to. That selfish love of thine will never again hurt my Margaret."

"Thy Margaret?" asked John almost in a whisper.

"Yes. Margaret and I are to be married. And thee will not come between us this time, John Baron!"

There was a dead silence. John and Daniel looked squarely at one another. In John's eyes there seemed no expression at all—just a cold blankness—until, suddenly and terribly, they glittered. He drew himself up with so magnificent a dignity that Daniel, however reluctantly, was awed, and, in a great,

resonant voice, cried out, "There is a commandment, Daniel. The fourth. 'Honour thy father and thy mother.'"

Daniel, who had no use for histrionics, countered this bluntly. "There might well be another commandment, I think," he said. "Honour thy children. Thee has never honoured thine, Cousin John. Thee has never willingly permitted them liberty of thought or action. And that is something which I've no doubt thee permits to thy clerks, to thy servants even. But not to thy children, oh, no! Charles has come off the best. He evaded thee—perhaps because thee never did love *him*. Thy so-called affection for Margaret has been her bondage. What life has she been allowed beyond this house, what pleasure since Charles left it? None! Last night, by the merest chance, she helped to bring a new life into the world. She had no knowledge, no experience, no assistance. But I think the ordeal saved her. When she held Charles's living child in her arms, she came to life herself. So she escaped thee. She is ready now to become the noble woman God intended her to be. But it is too late to say to thee—'Honour thy children.'"

Daniel, as he finished speaking, was trembling with anger and emotion, with the effort that such unusual eloquence had caused him. He braced himself to withstand the gust of rage which he expected from John Baron. But no rage came; no words even. John remained as if fixed to the spot, staring at Daniel. Once again his eyes expressed nothing but a cold blankness. The clock ticked loudly and still John said nothing. So Daniel left him.

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Margaret did not return to Bryanston Square. Her reason may have been, as Daniel believed it was, that in the struggle over Rose and Rose's child, something hitherto dead in Margaret had stirred—much as the baby itself had stirred in Rose's womb; that some voice cried out in her as clearly as the new-born child had cried. It may have been the joy of her reunion with Charles, her sense of his pleasure at seeing

her again, his gratitude for what she had done for him. Or else the sudden, the so unexpected triumph of her crushed and mortified love for Daniel may have changed her. Whatever the reason, she accepted quietly enough Daniel's somewhat modified version of her father's anger, sent to Hannah to pack her clothes and remained at Henrietta Street in attendance upon Rose and the baby.

When Charles, his debt settled by Daniel, had rushed back in the early morning from the spunging-house, it was Margaret who first laid his son in his arms.

"Oh, Charles," she whispered softly, "look at him. Are thee not proud? Isn't he beautiful?"

Charles, shyly inspecting the baby, could hardly agree with Margaret as to his beauty; he was so small and red and ugly. And yet as he laid a finger very cautiously against his son's tiny scarlet cheek, he did indeed feel proud. He smiled at Margaret, whose face was softly radiant.

"It might be your own, Peg," he said. "Tell me how Rose is?"

"She is very tired, dear. I think she is sleeping. But thee can creep in and look." If some of the sweetness left Margaret's face, she spoke kindly and without resentment.

Charles went to the bedroom, which now was fresh and neat. The nurse, who, by some misadventure had not received his message, had recently arrived and was sitting comfortably by a bright fire. Rose, as Margaret had warned him, was sleeping. Her face was very pale. Her pretty hair was spread about the pillow. She seemed to Charles so helpless, so touching in her exhaustion and in her ethereal beauty, that he stood gazing down at her, trying with all his might to love her again, trying to recapture what in their married life had been happy, to forget what had been wretched. Rose was his wife—worn out now by the pain of bearing his child—that queer little red baby. He must love her. Almost, at that moment, he did.

Rose opened her beautiful eyes. She blinked a little as if

wondering where she was; as she saw Charles, a frown disfigured her forehead. "Oh, Charles," she exclaimed fretfully. "What I have been through! Why did you leave me last night? Oh, God, how I suffered. Have they not told you how I suffered?"

"Yes, my dear, yes." Charles knelt beside the bed and took her hand. "Oh, my poor dearest. I do know how you suffered. But it's all over now and done with. And we have our son. Oh, Rose, what a fine fellow!"

Rose, still frowning at Charles, ignored this reference to the baby. "How strange you look," she told her husband sharply. "And how untidy. You have not shaved. Where did you go last night? Whatever were you thinking of to leave me?"

"Dearest, it was not my fault, I swear. It was a business matter which I'll tell you of some other time. Don't talk now, Rose. You are too tired."

"Tired. You put it mildly! And why this mystery about where you were. I believe you went to some party after the theatre and are ashamed to admit it."

"Rose! I——"

"Oh, pray don't make excuses," Rose retorted with such shrillness that the nurse left her seat by the fire and hurried to the bed.

"There, there, my dear," she said kindly, and added, turning to Charles, "You mustn't excite your good lady, sir. She's quite worn out, the pretty lamb."

"Yes, yes, I know." Charles answered. "I'll leave her to sleep again." And he suggested eagerly, "May I bring her the baby?"

But before the nurse could reply Rose spoke. "No," she said sullenly, "I don't want it here. I'm far too tired. I must sleep, I tell you. Your sister surely can see to the baby."

Charles walked out of the bedroom.

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For two days following Daniel's visit, John Baron remained

shut up in his study; no member of his household saw him, except the old butler, Farren, who was permitted to enter the room once a day, set down a tray of food and go away again in silence. John did not go to the bank. He may have slept at night, or he may not. Nobody knew.

Among the servants this strange behaviour of their master caused both curiosity and relief, even though the latter was tempered by fear that he might suddenly and unexpectedly emerge from the study and find them whispering. Yet even so, his absence from all other parts of the house, save his own room, could not fail to cause some lightheartedness, and Hannah, although gossiping with no one, went about the packing of Margaret's clothes with a glint of grim satisfaction in her eye. Her darling's broken heart was healed!

Sophia Baron, too, felt satisfaction; by no stretch of the imagination could she be said to miss those brief, chilling visits which her husband had been in the habit of paying to her room each evening. Sophia had dreaded these visits, dreaded the necessity of speaking to John at all, dreaded his unsympathetic manner, his mechanical, spiritless questions about her health. And so, for these two days she was positively happy, free from her husband's presence, and having, moreover, his strange behaviour to think about and to discuss.

"What does thee imagine has come over him?" she asked William John.

"I told thee, Mamma, what I have heard from Daniel. How Margaret is staying with Charles. That is enough surely to distress Papa most seriously."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. Mr. Baron always thought more of Margaret than of me, his own wife. Yet there was a time——" Sophia here began to chatter of that period in her past which she most loved to dwell on—the days when John Baron's swift courtship of the pretty Miss Huntley had made her for the first and last time a person of some importance.

She rambled on, until William John, listening as he always did to his mother with the kindest pretence of attention, yet

with his thoughts elsewhere, was astonished to hear her say, "Thee must know, William John, that although I never pass an opinion—why should I since no one would care to hear it—that I think thy father has been most foolish. He drove Charles to rebellion and now dislikes the result of it. I cannot see that it is so very shocking for a young man to go on the stage, provided he conducts himself properly. And as to Margaret, Mr. Baron should not have permitted her to take charge of Charles as she did. The boy would have done better left to his nurses."

Having delivered herself of this unexpectedly sensible speech, Sophia Baron flopped back against the cushions of her sofa as if exhausted. William John smiled at his mother and patted her hand; what a pity, he thought, that she had possessed neither the courage nor the necessary energy on her children's behalf to speak her mind many years ago to her husband.

William John knew, however, that it was useless to point this out to her. Sophia was sighing already and complaining of a headache.

"Shall I draw the blinds, Mamma, and let thee sleep?" he asked.

"No, indeed. I should only lie here fretting. I would like thee to read to me."

"What shall I read?" William John asked this question hopefully; for he still lived in expectation of the day when his mother would choose to listen to one of his own favourite books. But, as if in proof that this day had not yet come, Sophia drew from under her pillow an example of her own taste in literature, and in his fine, calm voice William John began to read some of the surprising, though always chaste, adventures of a certain Lady Anastasia de Willoughby.

Sunday came and still no member of the Bryanston Square household except Farren had beheld John Baron. On Sunday morning, William John, having read a chapter of the Bible to Sophia—a custom insisted on by his father and which Mrs

Baron, her thoughts straying wistfully to Lady Anastasia's boudoir, as usual endured—prepared himself to go to meeting. When, ready to start, he came down into the hall, he was amazed at the sight of his father, who, apparently quite composed, stood there waiting for him. John Baron did not speak, and so forbidding was his expression that William John did not speak either; he merely greeted his father with a timid bow and followed him in silence to the carriage. In silence, too, they sat together while the carriage made its way to the Meeting House in St. Martin's Lane.

On this particular Sunday a Friend recently returned from missionary work abroad was to speak; he was a quiet man, deeply devout and possessing great gifts of vocal ministry. To-day, however, he was longer than usual in rising to his feet, and in the customary silence of the Meeting House William John sensed a deeper, stranger silence which seemed, to his nervous imagination, to emanate from his father. He looked around at the assembled men and women who sat calmly and placidly waiting; then furtively he glanced at John Baron who, too, sat waiting but not, or so it appeared to his son, calmly. He was rigid, transfixed and tense. And so strongly did this attitude affect William John that very softly he touched his father's arm.

That touch for all its diffident lightness aroused John Baron to a swift and terrible vitality. He pushed his son's hand away, sprang to his feet, and raising his voice to a harsh cry delivered the famous and revered dictum of George Fox—"In the Light, every one should have something to offer."

But John Baron spoke these words with no reverence whatsoever.

There was a movement in the Meeting House; a murmur even. John was an Elder, a most respected member of the Society of Friends. It was not easy for those present to suppose that anything had gone amiss with him or that he had the intention of disrespect or violence. Yet for the first time the words of a great Quaker had been so spoken as to cause dismay.

Spoken in a voice that was wild, and hideous with a hint of madness.

William John, looking at his father, saw that his face was working. A vein stood out on his forehead. His lips were shaking. "Papa," he whispered.

But he got no further. Once more John Baron raised his voice, and this time there was no mistaking that strident note of insanity. "Listen," he bellowed. "Listen, all of you. I have a message—a message from God. He has sent us a new commandment. A new one, I tell you. A new one! Honour thy children! Honour them, I say."

John swayed; William John tried to support him, but his father's weight was beyond him. Crashing forward on to his face, John Baron fell. When they raised him up, his breath came in short painful gasps. His lips were flecked with foam.

CHAPTER THIRTY

John Baron

MARGARET sat by her father's bedside. Nearly five weeks had passed since John Baron had been carried out of the Meeting House in St. Martin's Lane and laid upon the bed in his own room. From the moment when he had fallen to the ground, all violence had left him; he was helpless and submissive; recognising no one; sometimes babbling nonsense to himself, but mostly silent. And one side of his body was paralysed.

Margaret had been brought to him immediately but he had not known her; he did not yet know her. Every day she came and sat for several hours by his bedside, and if John thought of her at all it was as a kindly and gentle stranger; he no more remarked her presence than that of William John, of Hannah, or of the two nurses who had been engaged to care for him. All faces seemed the same now to John Baron, and all of them lacked meaning.

If Daniel, hearing of John's sudden seizure, had feared that Margaret might once more be lost to him, he did not show his fear, and the concealment of it had been justified. Margaret Baron had again plighted her troth with her lover—this time she did not retract. She divided her days between Bryanston Square and Daniel's house in Bishopsgate Street, in which Charles, Rose and the baby, William Charles, were temporarily living. Two weeks ago, standing beside Daniel in the Meeting House, she had said these words—"In the presence of the Lord and of this assembly, I take this my friend, Daniel Ellesmere, to be my husband, promising by divine assistance to be unto him a loving and faithful wife until it shall please the Lord to separate us." Now she was Margaret Ellesmere.

As she sat alone that morning by her father's bedside her manner was outwardly placid; yet, through all her happiness, her love for Daniel, her trust in his protection, there ran a streak of fear. The doctors, it was true, held out small hopes of John's recovery. A swift cure they decreed impossible; a complete one most unlikely. But sooner or later, so Margaret believed, her father would regain some mastery at least of his mind. This utter blankness would pass in time from his senses and he would once more grasp and understand. He would know his daughter. He would question her, demanding answers and explanations. And Margaret, who at long last had escaped him, could not look forward calmly to such a moment of reckoning.

Yet she was radiantly happy. She and Daniel had their own comfortable home in the City; the whole of it now, for since the day when Catherine instead of Margaret had gone to share Cousin Samuel Ellesmere's house, the kind old gentleman had died. In that house were Daniel's children, who had seemed to rejoice at the coming of a new mother; and Charles also, with his baby son. And Rose. Here Margaret frowned. She could never like Rose, would always resent her moods and vanities, her tantrums with Charles, her flat refusal to feed little William, for whom they had been obliged to procure a wet-nurse. But although Margaret could not like Rose, neither any longer could she hate her. Since she had lain at last in Daniel's arms, Margaret could hate nobody. Her happiness was almost perfect, marred only by the old dread of her father, the anticipation of what John, returning to normality, might say to her. But, since Bryanston Square was Margaret's home no longer, even this dread was weaker than it might have been; she could always escape from old, sad associations and return to Daniel.

After sitting for about an hour beside John, Margaret was called downstairs to speak to Janey, who had driven up from Esher, ostensibly to inquire for her father, but actually to divert herself with some shopping. Margaret found her step-

sister in the parlour, handsomely dressed and full of a matronly importance.

"Well, Margaret," she said languidly, "and how is Papa?"

"He is just the same," Margaret replied. "There is no change in him whatever."

"Does thee think that there ever will be?"

"The doctors think it possible. I—I hope so."

Margaret could not restrain a little shiver; she changed the subject hastily by asking Janey if she had yet seen her mother.

"No, not yet," said Mrs. Burton. "I suppose I should go up to her for a minute."

"Thee supposes? Why, Janey, thee cannot mean to leave here without seeing thy mother."

"Very well then, I will," was Janey's fretful answer. "But Mamma does complain so. And I feel very poorly myself to-day."

"Indeed? Thee looks the picture of health."

"Then my looks are deceptive. Mr. Burton is greatly troubled about me. I—perhaps I had better tell thee, Margaret, that I—that I am expecting."

"Why Janey dear, what good news! I give thee joy." Margaret spoke with more affectionate warmth than was usual in her conversations with her step-sister.

Janey frowned, shrugging her shoulders. "When thy turn comes, for all this discomfort and trouble, Margaret, I doubt if thee will look so pleased. However, thee art far stronger than I am, and not so sensitive."

"I had forgotten that," Margaret replied dryly.

"It would be quite useless, would it not, for me to see Papa?" asked Janey.

"He will not know thee, I am afraid; but if thee would care just to peep in?"

"Oh, no; I hate a sick-room. And if he will not know me, what is the good?" Janey, aware perhaps that she had sounded callous, and knowing quite well the safety of such a question,

then asked Margaret, "There is no need, I suppose, for me to come here sometimes and sit with Papa? I would, as thee knows, but in my condition Mr. Burton thinks——"

But Margaret cut her short by saying coldly, "There is no need whatever, Janey. We have two nurses here, as thee knows. One for the day, and one for night. There are also Hannah, William John and myself."

"Oh, well, in that case *I* am certainly not needed." Janey was quick in turning what was a distinct relief into a grievance. "I will go up to Mamma now for a few moments, and then see William John. Is he occupied, by the way? I heard voices as I passed the library."

"He is with Charles."

"Charles? Does he come here now? How very strange!"

"Is it so strange that Charles should wish to inquire for his father? He is here this morning at the express desire of William John."

"Oh, I see. Well, I am getting pressed for time. Thee might tell me, Margaret, if Rose has any pretty wraps or gowns that I might copy for—for when—well, thee knows for when I mean."

Margaret did not trouble to answer.

In the library Charles was talking to his brother; although he had called on several occasions to ask after John Baron, this was the first day on which he had spent any length of time in the house, and he had come there this morning at the particular request of William John.

The two brothers had already been talking for some time, when William John, slowly pacing the large, handsome room, said cordially, "There, then, my dear Charles, is my proposition."

"That I should come into the Bank? With you. That I should support you?"

"Yes. They have called upon me, as I have told thee, to take my father's place on the Board. There will, I dare say,

be little enough to do; there will be older, more experienced men to advise me. But I am not cut out, Charles, for that sort of life. I want to be left alone. I am Papa's eldest son, and must do what I can, of course. But if only thee——"

"I know, I know," Charles smiled. "You want to be a sleeping partner. Is that not so, old slow-coach?"

"Thee has such energy, Charles. Thee has a good manner. Thee has charm as well."

Charles acknowledged this compliment with a little bow, but he said, "Not in Papa's eyes, remember. What would he say to this?"

"It will be many many months before he can say anything. The doctors tell us that even though he may, sooner or later, regain his senses, he will always remain an invalid."

"They are right, no doubt," Charles said dryly. "Just the same, brother, in his senses Papa would never permit me to re-enter the family—much less the Bank."

"I think that thee are wrong. I know that Margaret, even while she says nothing of it, dreads Papa's return to normality. But I——" William John hesitated as if suddenly ill at ease.

"Out with it, William John. You are not shy with me, surely?"

"No, not shy. But some things are difficult to speak of. So let me just tell thee this. I was with Papa at Meeting when this shocking outburst occurred. I use the word shocking because that, doubtless, is how it struck all the good people present. To me, it was not shocking. It seemed rather as if—well, brother, thee knows the Bible, does thee not? Thee remembers the man possessed by an evil spirit?"

"Yes. But I hardly see——"

"Does thee not think, Charles, that our poor father has been in many ways possessed? I do. And I believe that in the Meeting House at that very moment an evil spirit left him. I believe when his present state of vacancy has passed, when

he knows all of us again, that he will see us differently. And more truly."

"That is faith, brother! I—I never knew you had so much of it, you dear, good fellow. I doubt if I can share such a belief, but I can and do honour you for it."

William John laughed. "Thee had better not start to compliment me, Charles, or I shall hardly know thee. As boys thee had a pretty poor opinion of me, now did thee not? The stupid, plodding, timid, elder brother, eh?"

"Who never blabbed," Charles added, with a catch in his voice. Then he said brusquely, "If I do what you wish, it means leaving the stage."

"Yes. It means leaving the stage." William John watched his brother's face closely. "And that will be hard to do, I fancy. What are thy plans exactly since that fine success in *Romeo*?"

"I have only a small part in *Love*," Charles replied. "The cast was arranged before *Romeo and Juliet* and could not be altered. And *Love* is doing well. But Madame Vestris and dear Mathews have this plan in store for me—they propose to slip in between each of their modern productions a Shakespeare play; and, since I appear to have captured the critics' fancy, to let me try my hand at one big Shakespearian part after another."

"Mr. and Mrs. Mathews are good friends to thee, Charles," William John remarked.

"The best of friends." Charles's reply was curt.

There was a silence before William John spoke again. "Forget what I have asked, brother," he said gently. "We have had so little chance to talk together that I did not understand clearly what a fine future lies ahead of thee. Leave the Bank to me, Charles, and go thy chosen way."

"But——"

"And one more thing I'll tell thee. Much as I want thee to work with me, much as I hoped that thee would, I made that proposition as a sort of test. Forgive me, Charles. I have

always believed in thee. I have always admired thee for taking thy own way. And so I had the curiosity to know if thee would keep to it."

Again a silence. This time it was Charles who broke it. "I am grateful for your belief in me," he said. "But I am afraid it is not justified. I—I prefer to accept thy offer."

"Charles! But—but why?"

"I have a wife. I have a son. Is that not a good reason?"

"A good one, yes. But I doubt if it is sufficient. Charles, does thee love thy wife?"

"I owe her a duty," Charles answered very low. "I cannot maintain her and my child on my salary as an actor."

"I understand that some actors, successful ones at least, earn quite considerable salaries, and I assume that many of such actors are married and have families even. I think thee means, Charles, that thee cannot on an actor's salary maintain Rose in the style which she demands. Am I right, brother?"

"I married Rose," Charles replied shortly. "And I—I accept your offer."

"H'm," grunted William John. He took a turn about the room, before going up to Charles with his hand held out. He said, "My offer holds. But I would prefer that thee thought it over."

Charles gripped his brother's hand, and made no answer.

When Janey had gone to sit for a short while with her mother—poor Sophia, who was divided between relief that John was no longer able to intimidate her, and annoyance that her position as principal invalid of the household had been assailed—Margaret returned to her father's bedroom. She nodded a kindly dismissal to the nurse who had taken her place, and sat down again beside John.

He lay upon his back, and lay as still as death. His face was a greyish white, his breath came quietly, and his eyes were closed. His appearance was helpless enough, yet as she watched him a sense of suffocating fear came over Margaret;

the sick-room, though freshly kept, was very warm that day, and the spirit of this familiar, stately apartment seemed to clutch at Margaret with a grasp which was almost human. A frightful fantasy possessed her in which Daniel and her marriage to him had no existence; in which she was once again Margaret Baron, tied for ever by filial duty, and by fear to the man who lay in the bed. In her imagination a life of constant attendance on her father, in which neither love or independence held any part, stretched out before her. Some sudden aberration of the mind seemed to put back the clock, to snatch from her all that had happened since the night at Henrietta Street, to throw her once more into the close restriction which was her portion as the châtelaine of Bryanston Square.

A perspiration broke out on Margaret's forehead, and she sprang to her feet. Her fancy lied and she knew it. But she must prove the lie. She must leave this room instantly, this house too, and return to Daniel. She must speak to him, touch his hand, beg a reminder from him that he was indeed, and at last, her husband.

In her anxiety to escape, Margaret moved from the bedside with clumsy haste, upsetting the chair on which she had been seated. The thud aroused John Baron, who opened his eyes, and opened them very wide. It seemed to Margaret that for the first time since his seizure they betrayed a faint gleam of intelligence.

"What is the matter?" he asked feebly. "Who is there?" Gazing straight, and with a peculiar interest, at his daughter and in a slightly stronger voice, he asked, "Who art thou?"

As if bewitched, she looked back at him and mechanically answered, "Margaret." But, in a flash of defiance prompted by fear she added, "Margaret Ellesmere."

John's eyes flickered. To her intense astonishment, Margaret saw an expression of almost radiant tenderness cross his ravaged face. Then he murmured gently, "Margaret Ellesmere."

Ah, yes, dear Margaret Ellesmere. How I have missed thee."

He closed his eyes.

Margaret, ashamed and pitiful, crept back to her place by the bedside. All dread of her father's power of domination seemed to have left her. And she began, for the first time, dimly to understand him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

A Lady Returns Home

EARLY that afternoon Charles Mathews sat in his room at Covent Garden, poring over a multitude of papers. A frown troubled his handsome face. He added up a row of figures and sighed grievously, added it up again and smiled, added it up for the third time and sighed more grievously than ever. Pushing the papers from him, he ran his fingers through his luxuriant hair and groaned.

"The devil," muttered Charles Mathews. "The devil take it!"

It was of small use, really, all this adding up, since each time the total differed; it was of small use, too, attempting to sift to the bottom the complicated affairs of himself and his wife. Whatever adding, subtracting or sifting might be done, the result came inevitably to this—neither he nor Eliza Vestris had the smallest aptitude for finance. One fact—that their management of Covent Garden had proved, after the first setback, a very assured success, could not remove a second fact—that there remained from the past a veritable mountain of debt which had not yet been caught up with; and that, for all their fine takings now, it had become, what with writs, brokers-men and process-servers, an exceedingly difficult matter to keep abreast with current expenses. And moreover, that having been once to the Jews and then again and again, there was nothing for it but to go to the Jews once more.

This saddening and monotonous conclusion having been as usual arrived at, Charles Mathews sighed again; then grinned; pushed most of the papers off the desk on to the floor and helped himself generously to Madeira. And as he

paused contentedly to savour the bouquet of this admirable wine there was a knock at the door.

"Be ye friend or foe?" he demanded gaily. "But come in whichever you are."

The door opened and Charles Baron entered the room.

"Barty! The very man I am most delighted to see. Light in our darkness I might call you, Barty. Or, more aptly, corn in Egypt."

"Why?" Charles asked.

"Why? Take a glass of Madeira and I'll tell you. But what is the matter, my dear boy. Are you studying the part of Hamlet already? You certainly look glum enough."

"No, no. I am not glum," said Charles with an effort to sound convincing. "It's only—well, the weather is wretched, is it not?"

"It may be. I have not been near the window for some hours. I have been otherwise engaged, as you can see."

Mathews passed a glass of wine to Charles, who looked from the desk to the floor and smiled.

"You behold there, Barty," Mathews explained, "the best, the only way to deal with bills, demands, writs and suchlike horrors. Throw 'em on the floor, dear boy, and forget 'em."

"You are seriously embarrassed, then?" asked Charles.

"Not *seriously*, pray. The word is pompous and pays far too great a compliment to my creditors. Embarrassed, yes."

"But the takings are excellent, surely."

"They are. They could hardly be better. It is the old sins—or debts—that find us out. But I shall not worry. I refuse to worry. Or rather I refuse to worry for as long as this—er—trifle continues to be dealt with."

As he spoke Mathews handed over to Charles one of the few papers which still remained on the desk and which read as follows:—

THEATRE ROYAL—COVENT GARDEN¹*A return of all persons engaged in this establishment*

<i>Company—Gentlemen</i>		38
<i>Chorus singers</i>		8
<i>Ladies</i>		34
<i>Band</i>		32
<i>Officers</i>		9
<i>Box-keepers</i>		2
<i>Check and Money-takers</i>		15
<i>Bradwells's Department :</i>		
<i>Workers</i> 60—	}	82
<i>Supers</i> 22—		
<i>Scenery Painting Room</i>		10
<i>Sloman's Department :</i>		
<i>Carpenters</i> 26—	}	107
<i>For working Pantomime</i> 80—		
<i>Cassidy</i> 1		
<i>Gentlemen's Wardrobe :</i>		
<i>Workers</i> 24—	}	56
<i>Dressers</i> 14—		
<i>Extras</i> 18—		
<i>Ladies' Wardrobe :</i>		
<i>Workers</i> 42—	}	60
<i>Dressers</i> 14		
<i>Attendants</i> 2—		
<i>Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Lewis</i> 2—		
<i>Supers (per Horber)</i>		89
<i>Extra Chorus and Band</i>		13
<i>Property Department</i>		4
<i>Printers, Billstickers, Upholsterers, House-keeper, etc.</i>		57

¹ Although this list, copied from the *Life of Charles Mathews* by Charles Dickens the Younger, refers actually to the week ending December 26, 1840, it is quoted here as a rough estimate of Mr. and Mrs. Mathews's expenses one year earlier.

<i>Watch and Firemen</i>	
<i>Police</i>	4
<i>Attendants at bar, etc. :</i>	
Boxes 16—	42
Pit 18—	
Gallery 8—	
<i>Place-keepers</i>	7
<i>Box-keepers (deputies)</i>	10
	<hr/>
<i>Total</i>	<u>684</u>

Charles stared at the paper aghast. "You are actually responsible, then, for the payment of all these people?" he demanded.

"Precisely! You must remember though that we are drawing near the pantomime season. That is not a perpetual item, the Lord be praised!"

"But the others?"

"The others, my dear Barty, are perpetual items and must be faithfully provided for. And will be, never fear. For many a good reason. Now you, yourself, are one of these good reasons."

"I," faltered Charles with a nervous premonition of what was coming.

"Barty! Barty! Let's call a truce to such false modesty. You must know by now that most deservedly your Romeo took the town."

"Yes, but——"

"No. Hear me first. You're being talked of as a miracle. A man young enough to suggest romance and yet possessing wit enough to interpret what Shakespeare intended. It's not only the newspapers. They have forgotten you already until next time. But the public want you. We've had requests sent in that you should appear again, complaints, too, at the poor-ness of your part in *Love*. That's the beginning of fame, my Barty."

"I know. I am delighted. It is all your doing, and Madame's. But——"

"But me no buts, Quaker! You have a great future before you. Why, even other actors admit it. I'm told that Macready, of all people, who is jealous of his very supers, has acclaimed you in the Garrick Club. Now come, Barty, can fame reach further? To be acclaimed in the *Garrick* Club. And by such a sour-boots."

Although Mathews was laughing, Charles knew that much of what he said was in earnest, and, looking miserably at his friend, he still said nothing.

Mathews continued, "What I am trying to tell you, Barty, under cover of all this nonsense, is that we—Eliza and I—are counting on you."

"Counting on me?"

"To be sure. You're our discovery. Your Shakespeare, alternating with our new comedies, will raise this theatre to a very considerable pinnacle of excellence. And—incidentally—raise the takings also."

"I—I see."

"Barty, what's amiss. You seem so ill at ease. You—why, Barty, you haven't surely been considering some other offer?" An expression of mingled apprehension and reproach flashed across Mathews's face.

"No, *no*," Charles almost shouted. "Do you think, *could* you think, that I would play under any management but yours?"

"No," replied Mathews heartily. "I do not believe that I did think so. But your manner is so strange. You seem so little elated. So——"

Charles broke in quickly. "It is nothing, pray believe me. I am tired perhaps or——"

He paused as if unwilling to proceed.

To himself Mathews added, "Or worried to death by his wife"; but aloud he merely remarked with great casualness, "I understand, dear fellow. We all have these times of depres-

sion. Dine with us in my wife's dressing-room to-night, won't you? Only ourselves and Planché. Now do me the favour."

"I—yes, I'll be glad to," answered Charles.

He would dine with Charles Mathews and Vestris. He would dine merrily too. And to-morrow, at some time, and in some manner, he would tell these good friends of his—these friends who had believed in him and made him—that he must leave them; that he must leave the stage and its magic, forsake the darling ambition of his heart.

He had married Rose Clifford and once he had loved her. He loved her no longer. Yet to ensure that the home in which his baby son was to live should be decently peaceful, undisturbed by tears, by scenes and by reproaches, Charles, on the threshold of success as an actor, had promised within himself to abandon the stage. With a bitter reluctance, with a nostalgia for the days when no responsibility hampered him, he had resolved to take advantage of William John's suggestion.

When he left Mathews, agreeing cheerfully enough to return at five o'clock, Charles's intention was to go straight to Bishopsgate Street in order to acquaint Rose with his decision. This done, there could be no going back on it. And Charles believed that, once confirmed in his resolution, he would derive a kind of painful pleasure from dining, as a member of their company, with Mr. and Mrs. Mathews as merrily as if it were not for the last time.

As he left the stage door he was accosted by Thomas.

"Well, what is it?" Charles asked impatiently. "I am in a hurry."

"It's nothing of much consequence, sir," Thomas replied. "Only I thought as 'ow you might want to keep this." He produced from his pocket the old dagger which Vestris, nine years ago, had given to her small admirer; of which, in the anxious turbulence of his married life, Charles had half-forgotten the existence.

He took it eagerly from Thomas's hand. "Certainly I want that dagger. Where did you come across it?"

"Well, sir, I've just been at Mr. Hellesmere's going hover your suits, and—well, not to put too fine a point hupon it, sir—Mrs. Charles had thrown this 'ere dagger away with a lot of hother things what she said was rubbish."

Charles's hand closed tightly round his relic. Rubbish? In the light of what he had decided to do perhaps it was. The dagger could hardly claim to have fulfilled its mission; for whatever luck it had brought him was now to be taken away. He had been a fool doubtless to believe in the powers of an old piece of stage property; all such notions were foolish, if not actually sinful. And yet Charles did not want to lose his dagger. Not in that way certainly. Better discard it himself, grandly, as a last theatrical gesture, than have it thrown on to a heap of old finery and kickshaws.

"Thank you, Thomas," he said quietly. "I am going to Mr. Ellesmere's house myself now. I have some business to discuss with my wife, and shall return here later to dine with Madame, and Mr. Mathews."

"You was going to Bishopgate Street, sir, was you?" Thomas asked somewhat pointedly.

"Yes. I just said so," replied Charles, starting to walk away. "Don't delay me, Thomas. I have not overmuch time left before five o'clock."

"Master Charles," ventured Thomas, keeping step with his master, "I don't think as 'ow the mistress will be hable to talk to you at present. Just as I left, the old—er—Mrs. Clifford was hannounced."

"Oh." Charles stopped walking. "Was she indeed?"

"Yes, sir. And between you and me, sir, I think the two ladies was settling down for a good long talk."

"And what of that?" Charles began a little haughtily; then feeling the futility, before a tried and faithful servant, of such a pretence, he changed his tone, saying a little sheepishly, "I think perhaps I will not go to Bishopgate Street before the play after all. Mrs. Baron, as you say, will be too much occupied with her mother to talk with me privately."

Charles had a sudden foretaste of Mrs. Clifford's triumph over him; of her crude self-satisfaction that his ties with the stage were to be broken; a foretaste, too, of how, now that she could claim a son-in-law respectably employed, she would control himself and Rose, and do her utmost to draw them into her own particular type of society. He shuddered. And said briefly to Thomas, "I think I'll take a walk instead."

"Yes, Master Charles." Thomas was on the verge of permitting himself the liberty of a wink—since on the sore subject of their mothers-in-law all men are equal—when, catching sight of the look on Charles's face, he took the far greater liberty of putting his hand in affectionate sympathy upon his master's arm.

"What's hamiss, sir?" he asked humbly. "Won't you tell me what's hamiss, Master Charles?"

Charles shook off the friendly hand, but not before he had pressed it. "Nothing's amiss, you good old fool," he answered. "I am going to take a walk, that's all."

"Nothing hamiss," Thomas muttered to himself as his master strode away. "That's a good 'un, that is. Why, a babby could see that 'is 'eart's breaking."

Charles's walk appeared to have restored him, for when, at five o'clock, he tapped at the door of Madame Vestris's room and was admitted his manner was gay and care-free. His eyes were bright—a little over bright perhaps—and his coat was damp from the rain which had begun to fall, but his spirits seemed of the highest. Charles had not become an actor for nothing.

Dinner was served immediately. Planché, as Mathews had promised, was the only other guest, and it struck Charles that these three friends of his had never before been so glad of his company, so anxious to make much of him. The food, sent in from the Mathews's own kitchen, was excellent, the wine superb, and the room, beautifully appointed as were all the dressing-rooms now at Covent Garden, held every evidence of lavishness and prosperity. Eliza Vestris in a dressing-robe of

corn-coloured velvet took the head of the table. She was in fine looks that night; the lamps, cleverly shaded, flattered her, hiding those lines of fatigue upon her face which daylight emphasised. She was so gay, too, that Charles could only suppose that she was not in her husband's confidence regarding the tangle of difficulties which carpeted the floor of his room, or else, being in his confidence, that she shared Charles Mathews's capacity for throwing troubles to the wind when necessary.

"Barty must play Benedick," she remarked towards the end of dinner, when the fruit had been placed on the table.

Charles, facing Vestris, saw her through a mist. He had drunk a good deal of wine which, added to the distressed state of his feelings, threw over everything a glaze of unreality. Vestris, the sleeves of her robe falling away, showing her shapely arms, her elbows on the table, and in one hand a bunch of purple grapes, seemed to Charles part of a dream. As she smiled at him kindly, nine years rolled away, and she was once again a small boy's idol, a play-actress, a creature set apart, unattainable. Charles, well acquainted with her now, knew her to be no goddess on a pedestal, but an exceedingly human woman; while he always admired, he had grown used to her; respect and true friendship had effaced the glamour. Yet now, when it was soon to be over, his association with Vestris and with her husband regained a fairy-tale quality. He could no more credit this evening that he had worked with these people, that he had risen from obscurity to success under their guidance, than he could easily credit as a child that he had visited Vestris in her dressing-room and talked with her, and driven in her carriage.

And so he looked at her across the table, his eyes full of wonder, while Vestris, still smiling, said again, "Barty must play Benedick."

"The very thing," said Planché, "I've wanted for years to dress *Much Ado* and it so happens that I have never done so. Who's your Beatrice?"

"Lord, man, how can you ask!" Mathews exclaimed. "We have only one Beatrice." He put his hand affectionately on his wife's.

"Charles, don't be foolish. I'm not young enough," she answered, smiling.

"Nonsense," put in Planché, feeling that he had perhaps offended Mathews.

Charles said nothing. He merely raised his glass to Vestris and drank to her. Benedick to her Beatrice! . . . Only, as he alone of those present at the table knew, it was not to be. He would believe it just the same, he thought; believe it for just as long as this strange dream-like evening lasted.

"Now let us drink to Barty," Mathews called out cheerfully. And the glasses were raised. To Barty!

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Thomas had told no more than the truth when he informed Charles that Rose and her mother were settling down for a good long talk. Mrs. Clifford had been apprised by letter of the birth of William, but as she had then been visiting friends in the north, this was her first call upon her daughter and grandchild. The latter she examined cursorily and without much interest.

"A sweet little fellow," she said vaguely, and did not attempt to conceal her relief when William's nurse carried him away.

"And so, my love," said Mrs. Clifford as the door closed behind the woman. "I find you ensconced in the very citadel of the Ellesmeres. Which is, I admit, an improvement on that miserable den in Henrietta Street. But you do not intend staying here, surely?"

"Oh, how should I know what Charles intends, Mamma," Rose replied pettishly; in spite of a certain fragility she was, save for the evidence of bitter discontent which clouded her face, in great beauty.

"Child, child!" exclaimed her mother. "How little aptitude you have for managing a husband. And yet, before this silly

marriage, you were able to twist men round your little finger."

Rose frowned; she might have told her mother that these men, so easily twisted, had meant nothing to her; and that, scold at him though she might, she still loved Charles Baron. But she said nothing.

After a careful scrutiny of her daughter, Mrs. Clifford continued, "You are looking sadly, Rose, and small wonder. The idea of Charles's allowing you to bear a child under such shocking conditions! What can he have been thinking of?"

"The baby was not expected that night. He was born sooner than the doctor counted on," Rose felt obliged by honesty to answer.

"Nevertheless, you should not have been living in such a place at all. And what does this precious husband of yours propose now? Is there no talk yet of his leaving the stage?"

"None that I know of," Rose said sullenly.

Mrs. Clifford threw up her hands. "I can hardly credit it. The selfishness of men! His notion, I gather then, is to stay here in this dull house with these dull people until he can find some other lodging for you as poor as the last one. A fine prospect, I must say, for my daughter!" Rather reluctantly she added, "And for my grandson."

"We have hardly discussed the matter, Mamma," said Rose. "I—I had hoped that since Mr. Baron has suffered from this seizure that he might be softened, that some reconciliation might be effected."

"And so it might be, no doubt, if Charles would but attempt it. He has already won over his doting sister, as we know. I tell you, Rose, you must assert yourself. This nonsense must be stopped."

"Charles," said Rose slowly, "is, I think, more engrossed in his career than ever. He—he made a very great success, as I told you, as Romeo."

"Success as Romeo! Fiddle! Is my daughter to live in

sordid poverty, or on the generosity of Daniel Ellesmere, so that some stage-struck young fool may parade himself in Shakespeare?"

Rose, leaving her chair by the fire, began to pace the drawing-room. "Mamma," she said at last, "you are not entirely just. I—I went to Charles, did I not? I was eager for the marriage. As for his acting, such people who understand the art, praise it very highly. Have I the right now, when his chances are good, to ruin them?" Rose's loyalty was grudging yet she could not altogether restrain it.

Mrs. Clifford merely shrugged her shoulders. "You're such a child, my love," she replied pleasantly. "And from your point of view Charles's success may be even more disastrous than his failure. Only let him get on a little, and he will plunge into every kind of disreputable dissipation like all the rest of these actors. He will associate with the loosest kind of women, he will be unfaithful." She paused to glance sharply at Rose whose expression had already altered. To Charles's wife, the word unfaithfulness immediately conjured up a picture of Kitty O'Brien.

Mrs. Clifford, having allowed time for her last remarks to sink in, spoke again. "The cards are in your hands, child, if you did but know it."

"Yes," Rose agreed wearily; she, unlike her mother, was thinking of little William. "I had thought so myself."

"Will you be guided by me, love?"

"I—why, yes, Mamma, I suppose so."

"Very well." Mrs. Clifford sounded triumphant. "Here then, is my proposal. You are too delicate at present, too fatigued by all you have been through, to think for yourself, much less to argue with Charles. Why not come home with me?"

"You wish me to leave Charles?"

"No, child, no. At least, for a little while only. And for his own good. For the good of both of you. You need a rest from each other."

"That seems sensible enough, Mamma. I will mention it to Charles to-night, and perhaps come to you to-morrow."

"I want you," said Mrs. Clifford firmly and clearly, "to come with me now."

"Now? Without seeing Charles. He may not come home, you know, before the play. I can hardly do that, Mamma. It would seem like running away."

"That," said Rose's mother, "is precisely what I wish it to seem like."

"But——"

"Be quiet, Rose, and hear me out. Men must be managed. Particularly when they are husbands. You have done your best to persuade Charles to leave the stage and failed. Now you must adopt sterner methods. Come with me now. Leave a note behind you to say that you have gone for—well, for an indefinite period. You'll see how very quickly that will bring him to heel."

"Mamma, I do not understand you. I cannot leave Charles."

"Merely for an indefinite period," repeated Mrs. Clifford; looking hard and straight at her daughter, she added, "It is a chance to win or lose, Rose. If Charles Baron really loves you, he will come after you. He will renounce all his own selfish desires to get you back. If not—well, what have you lost? Nothing, my dear, in a husband who does *not* love you." And to herself Mary Clifford thought, Nor does he, I fancy. If I can take Rose from him now, this wretched marriage may be ended. Matters may so arrange themselves that she can make a better one.

Rose took another nervous turn about the room. It was true that she was unhappy; hating Charles's profession, hating the life it obliged her to lead, sensing the death of Charles's love for her, dreading, as her mother so astutely guessed, the possible rake success might turn him into. And for those very reasons Mrs. Clifford's plan in some way appealed to her. How wonderful to have Charles coming in pursuit, declaring his love, begging her forgiveness for all he had made her suffer.

Love, to Rose, was so inextricably bound up with endearments, flatteries, and scenes of passion, that she could hardly restrain a quiver of excitement at this prospect. But a quick fear pulled her up short. Suppose that Charles did not come. Suppose that he was glad to be rid of her, glad to continue, free from her reproaches and importunities, the life he had chosen.

Goaded by this fear, Rose said to her mother, "I will come with you now, Mamma, but I must bring William."

"William?"

"Yes. The baby."

"Bring the baby!" gasped Mrs. Clifford. "But, my dear child, you must have rest and quiet. You must forget your troubles. There is no need whatever to bring the baby."

Rose eyed her mother so shrewdly that Mrs. Clifford looked away. They read each other clearly then; Rose knew that her mother's real intention was to part her from Charles for ever; Mary Clifford knew that Rose still loved her husband.

She did not argue the point, however. Much as she disliked the prospect of being reminded hourly that she was a grandmother; much as she feared that the removal of Charles's child would bring about a reconciliation between its parents, she saw she must humour Rose. The baby must come with them. As to what would happen next, she must use her wits. The child might be sent back perhaps without Rose's knowledge. Or—but Mary Clifford decided to shelve that problem. She must remove her daughter from Daniel Ellesmere's house and quickly.

Margaret, on hearing that Mrs. Clifford had called, had gone out taking the two eldest of Daniel's children with her; Daniel was himself downstairs in that part of the house which was devoted to his business. So, persuading Rose that her clothes and the child's could be sent for, or new ones procured, Mrs. Clifford had the nurse summoned, and with most grandmotherly solicitude announced her intention of taking little William for a drive in the carriage. The good woman looked a little dubious, for the November afternoon was darkening, and

the streets were wet, but as it was hardly her business to protest, she dressed her charge as warmly as possible, and brought him to his mother. Rose, now in her bonnet and mantle, took the baby awkwardly. She had already written, at her mother's direction, a note which informed Charles that she was taking little William to Hertford Street for a visit. She was visibly nervous now, and Mrs. Clifford, eyeing with distaste the baby who looked like proving such an impediment to her plans, hurried her daughter and grandchild downstairs and into the carriage.

They had hardly started when Rose exclaimed, "Mamma, little William will have to return. He must be fed. He cannot do without Nurse."

"My dearest girl, do not fret so. That estimable person is not, I imagine, the only wet-nurse in existence. Another woman can be procured, or this one can follow us."

The tartness of her mother's voice made Rose hold her child more tightly. He was awake but very quiet, and for the first time since his birth, she felt some little flicker of tenderness for him. What, she asked herself, was she doing with this small helpless creature? Stealing him away from his father, taking him from the woman upon whom he depended for care and nourishment, was her conscience's uncompromising answer. As the carriage drove through the wet streets of the city, Rose more and more regretted the impulse of mingled weakness and vanity which had led her to obey her mother. It was cruel surely to alarm Charles in this way; cruel to take refuge with a woman who had never liked him, had been against him at every turn. Perhaps, thought Rose in terror, this outing, so beyond his routine, would cause little William to die. What then would Charles say to her? What then could she say to herself?

It had been a trick, she now admitted, to bring William with her. A trick to ensure that Charles would beg her to return; that he would acquiesce in her wishes and those of her mother. Had she been sure of his love, had she worked to

retain it, there would have been no need to involve the child in this silly adventure. No need really to have embarked upon this silly adventure at all. With a sudden urge to escape from such plotting, to return home, to make any honest reconciliation with Charles that might be possible, Rose turned to her mother. But Mrs. Clifford, deep in thought, gazed rigidly before her. Her face was cold and showed no signs of inviting any confidence whatsoever.

Rose leaned back again. She looked at little William, who, lulled by the motion of the carriage, had fallen asleep. After a while a tear or so from his mother's eyes dropped on the baby's face. Rose was weeping at the recollection that she had never said one word of kindness or congratulation to her husband after his triumph at Covent Garden.

The carriage stopped. Rose started, imagining they must have reached Hertford Street already; but they were come merely as far as Regent Street, and had drawn up outside the doors of Howell and James.

"I want to go in here, love, just for a minute," explained Mrs. Clifford, as the footman got down to open the carriage door. "I have had quite a pother over matching some violet silk, and they promised me that the right shade would arrive from France to-day. You had better stay where you are, child, with the baby."

"Very well, Mamma," Rose answered quietly.

Mrs. Clifford went into the shop. The footman, his mackintosh cloak glistening with raindrops, returned to the carriage. Rose, leaning forward, knocked sharply on the window-pane.

"Yes, madam." The man opened the carriage door and put his head in.

"I wish to return to Bishopsgate Street. I wish to return at once." Rose's voice shook with excitement. As she had watched her mother enter the shop she knew suddenly what she could, what she must do.

"But, madam—the mistress?" the man protested.

"You can come back for her. Drive me to the city at once."

The footman looked extremely doubtful. Mrs. Clifford was an exacting employer. Her servants all feared her. What would she say on emerging from Howell and James in such a downpour and finding her carriage gone. "Will you not wait for the mistress, madam?" he ventured.

"No," Rose replied imperiously. "I must go home immediately." A little lamely she added, "The child should not be out in such weather. Please do as I say." As her manner changed, so did her face. The footman saw a piteous look in young Mrs. Baron's eyes, and observed that she had been crying; perplexed and uncertain, he moved away from the carriage door, leaving it open, and took counsel with the coachman, who, the reins held slackly in his hands, leaned down from the box to hear what his underling had to say to him.

A man coming out of a doorway close to Howell and James and crossing the pavement in the direction of Mrs. Clifford's carriage, abruptly unfurled his umbrella. One of the horses reared; the second, infected by its comrade's fright, reared also. A passer-by yelled out a warning that came too late. The coachman, his thoughts elsewhere and leaning from the box already, was flung heavily to the pavement. The carriage, its door still open, hurtled madly down the crowded street.

With a cry, and with an instinctive movement, Rose made an attempt to seize and close the door. But it swung from her reach. She heard shouts and screams, saw people who ran, others who stood gaping. For one moment the furious pace of the horses seemed to slacken. And in that moment a woman, running towards the kerb, gestured wildly. With a lightning comprehension of that gesture, and with a desperate swiftness, Rose threw William straight into the arms stretched out to catch him.

The impetus of the carriage quickened. Rose was flung violently from side to side. She screamed wildly. Tried to gain the door. Was flung back to the other side. And screamed

once more. Then, as the maddened horses swung headlong round a corner, the carriage crashed violently against a great brewers' dray. The shafts gave, one horse rushed on, the other fell struggling amongst the wreckage. A frightened crowd collected. From Regent Street a woman came running, holding safely in her arms a small baby. But by the time she reached the mangled carriage some one had dropped a cloak over Rose Baron's dead body.

1840

EPILOGUE

In Soho

It was a fine, mild evening in May—eighteen hundred and forty. A Sunday evening. Charles Baron was walking the London streets; in his pocket was a volume of Shakespeare's comedies and the part of Benedick ran through his head. As he walked he said the lines over to himself.

He lived alone now in quiet lodgings off the Strand, where a motherly landlady, very different from Mrs. Hardwicke, looked after him. And every day he visited a house in Bishopsgate Street whose hospitable roof sheltered his son, William Charles Baron.

Little William, who was pink and pretty now, no longer at all scarlet, had, it is true, no mother. His grandmother could not bear even the thought of him, while his grandfather, beyond recognising that he was a baby, had not yet grasped the fact of his existence. But little William was by no means to be pitied. He had a handsome young father who brought him toys more suitable for a child of five years than of eight months old, and who played with him delightfully; an aunt—step-aunt it was true, but little William had no use for such fine distinctions—who adored him and who would undoubtedly continue to do so even when another, eagerly awaited baby came to join the nursery circle. There was a step-uncle by marriage who handled him most tenderly and four happy children whose favourite plaything little William was; a grave but kind uncle the first of whose names the baby bore; a number of affectionate relatives from Sussex and, as a sort of worshipping henchman, or court jester, a lanky individual who sang a great many songs and addressed the baby already as Master William.

To add still further to the admirers of this fortunate infant—a gentleman with merry eyes, who sometimes visited the nursery, hailed him as “Barty Junior” and with this gentleman came a handsome, fashionably dressed lady, who, when little William gazed at her with round, round eyes, would say triumphantly, “He’s the little Quaker all over again. See how he looks at me.”

To which the gentleman would reply, “You are insatiable, Eliza. You demand homage even from a baby.”

It is more than evident, therefore, that William Charles Baron was by no mean to be pitied.

Little William’s father, pausing beside a street lamp, took out his Shakespeare to verify a line; and as, somewhat at random, he opened *Much Ado About Nothing*, his eye was caught by the enchanting words of Beatrice—“there was a star danced and under that was I born.” Charles shut the book abruptly. He thought of Kitty. Kitty who had a gaiety akin to that of Shakespeare’s Beatrice.

It was not the first wistful thought that Charles had had of Kitty. But for a while after Rose’s death he had tried his hardest to suppress them; it had seemed so cruel, so callous then to think of another woman. Rose’s tragedy haunted Charles who often found his thoughts returning uneasily to his solitary walk upon the sands at Weymouth and to old Arletti’s prophecy. Then he would suffer from distorted pangs of conscience. But, since his conscience could not regulate his wishes, he did think more and more of Kitty, until towards the end of April he wrote to her. The letter remained unanswered.

Charles walked on, trying to study his part; but Benedick evaded him, and he felt sadly out of tune now with that witty, light-hearted gentleman. Because the evening was beautiful and his heart was desolate he walked towards Frith Street, knowing this course to be a futile one. Number Seventeen was still empty. Only a week ago, Charles, having gone there to look, had seen it standing shabby and deserted, and had found

Philip O'Brien's musical instrument shop occupied by a tailor who did not live on the premises.

But to-night the house was not empty. So the tailor had perhaps rented that as well. A bright light showed in an upper window; a fainter one gleamed through the fanlight above the door. And as Charles stopped in surprise upon the opposite pavement he heard the shrill, excited barking of a dog.

The front door opened and the dog ran out. And a woman's voice called after it, "Wait, Dandy. I'm coming."

"Dandy!" Charles cried aloud, and Dandy, with the astonishing memory for their friends which all dogs have, darted across to him. He jumped up at Charles, expecting a caress, but for once he was disappointed. For Charles was gazing at the doorway of Number Seventeen, where, silhouetted against the light, stood a woman. She spoke once more to Dandy.

"Come here. Bad dog. Come here."

Charles had found Kitty.

THE END

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